

The Assassin's heart was racing as he sprinted down the beach, stumbling as his feet hit cold sand. A gust of cool wind tugged at his hood, making his teeth chatter as it hit the trickle of blood seeping down the side of his face. He glanced over his shoulder and kept sprinting, slightly relieved to see that he wasn't being followed. Not for the first time, he cursed the anti-apparition ward that he had been struck with. It was different from what he was used to, for every single one of his portkeys would activate but leave without him. It wasn't meant to be like this.

It had all gone wrong from the start. As soon as he had moved in, the other wizard had known he was there. Spell after spell failed to penetrate the target's defences. He seemed largely immune to the toxic nundu's breath he had blown through his room and the fiendfyre that he had summoned only served to make the target laugh, as if the most the cursed flame could do was tickle him! In a matter of seconds, all of his options had been spent and he had struck at him several times. Long ago, his Master had once told him that surprise was the most powerful weapon of an assassin, and that not even Merlin could have stopped a killing curse if he were sleeping. The Assassin had lost surprise.

So he ran.

He knew he was being chased. Some part of his mind whispered that he was merely being toyed with; that with a wizard who had such a reputation as his target could have killed him in an instant had he felt like it. The Assassin blocked off that part of his mind and ducked behind a muggle automobile. Despite his disdain for the lesser kind, the Assassin took a moment to admire the sleekness of the automobile. They had certainly come far. He remembered the slow, clunky things that had come out late last century. They were nothing like they were today. Why had things had changed so much and he had changed so little? Was that why he had failed, why a younger, more inexperienced wizard was besting him?

No. He was good... very, very good. Not the best- he didn't want to be the best. Nobody with brains wanted to be the best, it meant that there was always somebody wanting to surpass you and in his line of

work, that usually led to a very bloody death. His target just wouldn't die.

"C'mon, you can run faster than that!" whispered a mocking voice from behind him.

The Assassin spun around, a volley of single-slice cutting curses pounding from the end of his wand. The pavement was torn to shreds, bricks fell from the wall, cleaved perfectly in half, and a door fell off a nearby automobile.

"Merlin!" the Assassin hissed furiously.

He sprinted away from the side of the road and ducked into a side alley. It was filthy, covered in muggle garbage and crusted algae, but it would do. He couldn't afford to be choosy in his places of ambush. He whirled around and whispered to himself, "Aperio Lux!"

Bright light sprung from his wand, a huge flash that rippled outwards. The spell- Revealing Light- would wash over any invisibility charms and the like and negate them. Even invisibility cloaks were affected. At the same time, the Assassin slunk in the shadows with a carefully selected spell and waited. He kept silent as the light dimmed and the alley returned to darkness.

A full minute passed. The Assassin waited with bated breath, his eyes seeing through the darkness quite easily courtesy of the Owl Vision potion. Finally, there was movement at the end of the alley and his target strolled on through. It appeared a casual walk but the Assassin's trained eyes picked up on how the boy's legs were coiled and ready and knew that the boy would spring into action as soon as the Assassin made his move.

Slowly, as to not attract any attention, the Assassin reached into his robes and pulled out a slender throwing knife. Coated in a deadly poison, one prick with the knife would kill a fully matured wizard in less than a minute. Even if the wizard were to take a bezoar, he would still be unable to move his limbs properly before the Assassin could slink up and slit his throat.

He took careful aim and threw the blade. As soon as he was done, he tapped himself on the head and concentrated on the spell. Darkness filled his vision, but he was able to see the boy jerk his head back with an amused smile on his lips before he disappeared. He reappeared in the shadows on the other side of the alley. Another slender knife was thrown through the air with slender precision, this time drawing a line of blood against the boy's cheek.

The boy hissed and the Assassin felt victory surge through him. Yet, he did not relent, darting from shadow to shadow and throwing his poison knives with deadly accuracy. A dozen knives skimmed through the air, deflected by the boy's wand with unnerving accuracy and a shower of glowing sparks. It was too late for that, the Assassin internally crowed. You were already defeated.

He waited in the shadows once more as the boy stiffened and rubbed his cheek slowly. Anytime now, the boy would topple over and collapse. All the Assassin would have to do then is make sure he was truly dead and the twenty-thousand galleon bounty was his. As minutes passed, however, the Assassin grew worried. The boy remained upright, occasionally rubbing his cheek but doing little else—and that included succumbing to the poison. Why wasn't it working?

"Not bad," somebody breathed into his ear. Something dug into the small of his back and the Assassin's eyes went wide, even as the boy looked up from the alley and smiled, before vanishing abruptly. An illusion. Which meant...

"Wait..." The Assassin tried, but cried out as silver light filled his vision.

Something cleaved into him and blood shot up his throat. He gagged, clutching his stomach and toppling to the ground, the defensive weaves in his robes no match for whatever enchanted weapon the boy was using. He was dying. He could tell. So this was how it ended. He, the deliver of death, the master hunter, hunted down instead. How ironic. He gazed up at his target and managed a weak smile.

The boy crouched below him, looking amused and sheathed a glowing silver sword.

“Like I said, not bad,” he said. “The shadow trick was cool, I’ve only ever seen one other person do it before- although he did do it a lot better than you.”

The Assassin stared up with rapidly glazing eyes.

“The thing is, I knew exactly what was happening as soon as you threw the second knife,” the boy continued. He gave a chuckle. “That’s probably why you didn’t notice an illusion take my place. I just sat back and watched you exert yourself, which was pretty funny.”

The Assassin’s breathing was slowing. He only had a few moments left. The boy obviously felt it as well as he stood up and reached into his pocket, pulling out a wand.

“Well, I suppose this is it for you,” he said cheerfully. “Unfortunately, for you, I’ve got some bad news and some terrible news. Do you want to hear it?”

The Assassin managed to jerk his head.

“Great!” the boy said with a grin. “Well, the bad news is that I’m going to have to burn your body so it can’t be traced back to me. That means you’re family or whatever won’t be able to have an open casket funeral.”

That was alright, the Assassin didn’t have any relevant family left. His grandson had estranged from the family business, and the last he heard his great-granddaughter was just entering Hogwarts this year. He was the last of an era gone by. Nobody would miss him.

“The terrible news is that I’m not going to wait until you’re dead to do it,” the boy finished with a malicious gleam in his eyes. The Assassin visibly recoiled. Surely he didn’t mean....

“Evertoxuro!”

The Assassin’s world dissolved into a pit of fire and pain as bright flame lit up in his eyes. The last thing he was capable of seeing was

his target, Harry Potter, watching him burn with an amused twinkle in his eye and a laugh on his lip.

“Okay, as entertaining as that was, this is starting to piss me off,” Harry complained out loud as he watched the assassin burn below him. He turned away, already losing interest and strolled out of the alley and into the darkened streets. “That’s the third this month. I’m meant to be on holiday.”

It had been a few months since the end of his fifth (and last) year of Hogwarts. Harry was sure he had grown. A faint tan covered his skin, remnants of holidays in warmer areas, while his hair was longer and messier than ever. He was dressed rather casually as well, a pair of beach shorts and a short shirt, although the look on his face showed that his break hadn’t taken care of his anger problem.

“It is almost October,” Meciél said. Her illusion appeared by his side, as beautiful as ever in her white and silver robes. Her dark hair swayed behind her as she glanced down at Harry shrewdly. “Your holidays have dragged on longer than I had been expecting.”

“Well, you can thank the shiny piece of shit here for that,” Harry said mock-cheerfully, brandishing the Sword of the Cross in her face.

Meciél grimaced and took a step away from the blade, even though it was hardly going to hurt her. She only existed in his head, after all.

“Twenty-six times,” Harry continued, glaring at the sword. “That’s how many times this thing has yanked me off my holiday and made me go save some helpless schmuck or the other. I almost declared war on the Red Court Vampires last month, remember? I hate the stupid thing.”

“Then dispose of it,” Meciél suggested tiredly, seeming quite used to this particular grievance of Harry’s by now.

“Oh, yeah, great idea!” Harry retorted sarcastically. He crossed the road, absently flipping a finger up at the yells of a driver who swerved to avoid him. “Why didn’t I think of that? Oh, wait, I did. It comes back! It’s like a fucking dog that just doesn’t get the hint! I leave it at

the hotel and it somehow gets in my bag. I drop it off that cruise ship and it winds up next to me on the bus in Amsterdam. It just doesn't get the fucking hint!"

"Then perhaps its time we go back," Meciél suggested and Harry halted.

"Are you sure?" he asked her, staring at her carefully. "If we go back... then we get back to work. I'm all for it, to be honest, but I thought you wanted to wait for a little while."

"It's been long enough," Meciél answered. Her silver eyes flashed with sudden hatred and her lip curled back at her next sentence. "The Order of Blackened Denarius," she all but spat out the name, "will have restructured itself by now. Those who went into hiding will have emerged. It is time that I began to put my plans into action. I will have my revenge."

"...and I will have my cotton candy," Harry declared. He crossed his arms defensively as Meciél stared at him exasperatedly. "Hey, I earned it!"

"The deal was that you get a free cotton candy for children under twelve," Meciél sighed. "You're not twelve, Harry."

"I still want my damn cotton candy," Harry muttered sourly. "I can't believe they kicked me out, although I suppose it's a good thing they did. That way, I don't too feel guilty for burning the place down."

"If you weren't so cheap with your money then none of it would have happened," Meciél reprimanded.

"Hey, I had to rob three petrol stations for this cash," Harry said with a scowl. "I'm not spending my hard-earned money on stupid cotton candy when I could have gotten it for free!"

"Very well," Meciél said in resignation. "I won't argue this with you again- for the twelfth time."

Harry snorted and muttered something under his breath. He stopped at the railing by the beachside and glanced up at the cloudy sky. It looked like it was going to rain soon- there was that smell in the air. Meciél stood behind him, her fragrance washing over him like a familiar perfume, one that he would always associate with her.

“Ah, fine. Let’s go back,” Harry grumbled after a few moments. He scratched his chin as he checked his pockets, making sure he had his shrunken bag and all of his belongings. “Got a destination?”

“First, we need information,” Meciél answered. “On the Denarians, and on Lord Voldemort.”

“Ah, well, I know exactly who to see about the last guy,” Harry said. He twirled on his feet and disappeared with a sharp crack.

Harry Potter was coming back to England.

A/N: Allow me to say that this chapter was a bitch to write, and kept me stone-walled for two damn weeks. Nonetheless, here it is.

Halfway across the world, the sun was slowly peeking up from the east. Beautiful shades of colours splayed out across the horizon, soft orange melding in with striking violet, while the crescent moon peeked out from low, dark clouds. On a suburban street, amidst a row of above-average housing and the shiny new BMW model that everybody seemed to have, a loud crack resounded through the air. A cat hissed, its luminous yellow eyes glaring at the dark-clad figure that had just appeared in the middle of the road. The figure ignored it, gazing down the street to a house that only a select few could see.

“Still looks like a shithole,” Harry observed wryly. The cat that had hissed at him emitted a small growling noise and began to stalk behind him, much to his amusement. “I wonder if it knows how badly I could turn it into a bag of sausages.”

‘I’ve seen worse,’ Meciél said and Harry sighed as the edges of his mind began to fuzz over.

“Alright, alright,” Harry muttered irritably, tapping the side of his head with his knuckles, as if it would be enough to stop the Meciél-induced flashback to the past. “You’ve probably seen a lot more naked women than me as well- yet you never offer to show me them.”

‘That’s because you’ve never asked before,’ Meciél spoke teasingly and Harry halted at the doorstep of Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. The cat stalking him came to a halt and hissed at him, a surprisingly deep growl coming from its throat

“You mean...” Harry started hopefully.

‘No,’ Meciél interjected in amusement.

“Then why offer?” Harry demanded to know, a scowl forming on his lightly-scarred face. He absently rubbed the lightning-bolt-shaped scar on his forehead, which was usually too pale to notice, and moved down to the slice that Wormtail had given him. “If you’re just being a tease, then on behalf of blue-balled men all over the world I

am obligated to call you a teasing bitch, before raping you and claiming that 'you wanted it'."

'As you can tell, I am struck with fear over your insidious threats,' Meciél deadpanned. 'My wholly incorporeal body is shaking at the thought.'

"Smart-arse," Harry muttered under his breath. He rapped on the door loudly, giving it a good kick just to be on the safe side, and waited. Behind him, the cat hissed and Harry sighed in annoyance and spun around.

"It's like this, kitty," Harry growled. He pointed his wand at his throat, took a deep breath and opened his mouth. A resounding screeched boomed out, a piercing screech that sent shivers down the spines of the suddenly-awakening neighbours.

The cat yowled and bolted, its fur standing on end, as Harry sniggered and turned around.

"Cat, zero, Harry Potter, in the million," Harry chuckled under his breath. "I know, Meciél, I know. The depths of my awesomeness know no bounds."

'I'm just surprised you didn't kill it,' Meciél replied blandly.

"Whoa, kill a cat? A small, four-legged, furry thing?" Harry exclaimed in mock-horror, clasping a hand over his heart. "I'm evil, Meciél, but I'm not totally depraved."

Any further banter between the two were cut off as the door opened. Harry cocked his head as the haggard form of Sirius Black appeared, staring down at Harry with hollow eyes and a grim smile.

"Hi, Harry," he said softly.

"Black," Harry greeted casually, although there was a dark undercurrent in his voice. "Raider any pubs in the name of the Dark Lord Voldemort recently? No? Tell me you've at least blown up a

street full of people. It'd be a shame if, despite all those rumours, you're just a big pussy."

"I almost killed my cousin the other month!" Sirius said defensively.

"Almost?"

"The bitch got away," Sirius muttered with a scowl.

"Well, that's something," Harry conceded. He gave Sirius an arrogant grin and raked his hand through his hair, noting how the gaunt man stiffened at the gesture. "Murder. Don't you just love it when you keep it in the family? It makes the whole concept so...personal."

Sirius grunted, still blocking the doorway as his jaded grey eyes glazed over. Harry waited impatiently for a few moments, before sighing in irritation and brushing past the other wizard to enter the house.

The Headquarters for the Order of Phoenix looked just as gloomy as he remembered it. Granted, he had only been there once before but it didn't look like much had changed. Cobwebs and dust covered the surface of some doors, the flood gleamed with an odd shine that only came with one-too-many cleaning charms and the house-elf heads leered down at them from above the staircase.

"For what's its worth, this house has magnificent dramatic effect," Harry said loudly.

He heard the front door close behind him and Sirius hurried up to him, a neutral expression plastered over his stony face.

"Why are you here, Harry?" he asked tiredly.

"Well, in the beginning, God ate a bad pizza and had some bowel problems. The wide array of digested ingredients from the pizza exploded in what we call the Big Bang, spreading light, life and Italian immigrants all over the universe..."

“Harry,” Sirius interrupted, although he looked like he was trying to hide a smile.

“Is Dumbledore in?” Harry asked, peering at the closed kitchen door. Light spilled from the crack beneath it.

“Actually...yeah,” Sirius said. He frowned at Harry in puzzlement. “How did you know we had a meeting?”

“I didn’t,” Harry replied in surprise. He scowled, his hand lingering to the cane sheath strapped over his bright aloha shirt. “I guess it was just...luck,” he said with gritted teeth.

“Nice shirt,” Sirius said after an awkward silence. A faint smile crossed his face. “You really have been on holidays, haven’t you?”

“Hawaii,” Harry answered with a yawn. He rubbed the back of his head tiredly. “Where’s Dumbledore?”

“He’s...” Sirius started, jerking his thumb at the closed kitchen door, when it abruptly opened and Albus Dumbledore strode out. “Right here,” Sirius finished without missing a beat.

“Good morning, Harry,” Dumbledore greeted politely.

Harry gaped in surprise as he surveyed the older wizard with nothing short of incredulity. True to his eccentric ideas in fashion, he wore his favourite long, purple robes, that ones that had the silver stars stitched on that twinkled in the same fashion as his deep blue eyes. His beard was a quite a bit shorter, his face a tad bit gaunter and his arm just a bit on the dead side. Harry caught a glimpse of dead, blackened fingers from underneath the purple robes and cocked his head in surprise.

“Shit,” he said blandly. “Did you get some friction burns after finally relieving yourself after fifty years of celibacy, or was there something I missed last time we met?”

“All in due time, my boy, all in due time,” Dumbledore said merrily. He stretched out his hand- the good one- and Harry shook it firmly. “Come. Let me introduce you to the Order of Phoenix.”

“Albus...” Sirius started.

“Now, Sirius,” Dumbledore interrupted. His face didn’t change even a fraction but Sirius almost winced under the reprimand. “We have talked about this. I trust Harry with my life- well, actually, I did trust him with my life some time ago and, as you can see, I am still here.”

“Most of you, anyway,” Harry commented cheerfully, tugging at the blackened finger of the other wizard. Sure enough, Harry confirmed what he thought as a tingle ran through his body at the contact and Meciél began to analyse the sensations.

‘His arm is dead, the flesh destroyed by powerful dark magic,’ she spoke, and Harry caught a flash of worry emanating from her. ‘I recognise the scent of this power. It was Lord Voldemort.’

Dumbledore led Harry into the kitchen, which seemed a lot bigger than Harry had remembered it. A long table stretched from one end of the room to the other and its occupants ceased talking and stared at the new arrival. Harry counted about twenty or so of them, from McGonagall to, of all people, Fleur Delacour. Some of them looked openly excited to see him, while others watched him carefully- as if they didn’t know if he could be trusted yet.

“My friends, allow me to introduce you to a person that you have undoubtedly heard of before,” Dumbledore started cheerfully. He clapped Harry on the back, to which Harry glanced back at the Headmaster with an irritated glare. “Harry Potter, meet the Order of Phoenix.”

Harry glanced over them, feeling decidedly unimpressed. Alright, so there were a few Auror here and there- Harry could tell from the way they held themselves. This included a tall, dark-skinned wizard with no hair and serious eyes, a short, spunky witch with multicoloured hair and old Alastor Moody, as grizzled and crippled as ever. But on

the whole, the membership of the Order of Phoenix looked to be... average, at best.

"This is it?" Harry asked, a look of disdain spreading across his features. "This is your army to fight Voldemort?"

Harry shook his head in disgust as several of the members shuddered or flinched at the name and gazed back at Dumbledore, not looking impressed at all.

"I suppose it's a good thing I came back," he said dryly. "Otherwise you'd be well and truly fucked by now."

"Thank you for your interpretation of events, Harry," Dumbledore said calmly amidst the disgruntled mutterings of his Order. He gestured at one of the empty seats and asked, "Would you like to sit down?"

"Albus, surely you don't mean for a child to join the Order?" A plump, red-haired woman spluttered, bristling with righteous indignation.

"This isn't a child, Molly, this is Harry Potter!" argued a rosy-cheeked witch with long black hair. She gave Harry an appraising stare, which Harry returned lazily. "I think we all know what he is capable of bringing to the Order."

"I've heard those nonsensical rumours..." Molly started.

"Rumours?" the young female Auror repeated. She snorted- and Harry stared in shock as she literally grew a pig's snout and gave a snort- and shook her head. "From what I saw in the Department of Mysteries, the rumours don't give him justice."

"Can we trust him?" spoke a soft, silky voice from the other end of the table. Harry narrowed his eyes as Severus Snape made his displeasure known. "If Potter is what the Dark Lord thinks he is, then he could become a far more dangerous enemy than we can imagine."

Harry glanced at Snape carefully, his eyes glittering. Snape, in return, looked absolutely smug as he leaned back in his chair, unperturbed by Harry's analysing stare.

'Now what did he mean by that?' Harry mentally wondered.

'I think you know,' Meciell answered grimly. 'It seems as if our enemy is pre-warning his servants of your true nature. This could end badly for us, Harry.'

'Easy solution to that,' Harry replied and a sadistic smile played across his face as the Order argued around him. 'We kill them all and anybody they told.'

'Simple, yet elegant,' Meciell said dryly. 'I do like how you think.'

"He's dangerous," Moody grunted, adding in his own opinion. He stared at Harry with his unblinking eye. "He's wand happy and eager to kill. I don't like it- but I hate Death Eaters more. We could use him."

"I don't see..." somebody else started at the table became a raging debate as people took sides.

Harry and Dumbledore stood back, the latter watching the events with a close eye and probably gauging how to act next, the former yawning and scratching his arse.

"Maturity," Harry started, cocking his head and gazing at Dumbledore with languid eyes. "It's listening to that," he jerked his thumb at the table. "... and not blowing the shit through them for talking like I'm not here."

Sirius gave a bark of laughter, which was quickly cut off with a round of coughs as Dumbledore glanced at him. The gaunt man shuffled on his feet and ducked his head as Dumbledore turned to Harry and smiled.

"If I did not believe that you were ready, I would not have invited you into the room," he called out loudly, his voice somehow being heard over the rabble before him.

Many of the Order members stopped and looked sheepish. One of them, a whitened wizard that looked as old as Dumbledore, nodded his head sagely.

"Trust Dumbledore," he said gruffly. He broke off into a round of loud, painful-sounding coughs and covered his mouth with the back of his hand. "Haven't we always?" he finished when he was done.

Harry had had enough and strode forward and dropped into the offered seat. He placed his feet up on the table and smiled coldly at the witches and wizards surrounding him.

"Did I say I wanted to join your stupid club?" he asked softly. The room was deathly silent. "The only reason I came here was to speak to Dumbledore."

"About what?" a man with long red hair and a fanged earring commented.

"About the assassin that just tried to kill me, oh..." Harry paused, frowning. "Thirteen minutes ago," He concluded.

There were shocked mutterings from the table and Dumbledore strode across the room to seat himself at the head seat. The old wizard looked grave and Harry rolled his eyes.

"C'mon," he complained. "It'll take more than some shitty little poison to kill me. Voldemort hasn't. Vesper couldn't."

"Are you alright?" Molly asked, disapproval breaking way to concern.

"Obviously," the young Auror commented wryly. "Who was the assassin?"

"No idea," Harry responded lazily, shifting in his seat. "He didn't live long enough to give me his name."

"What about a body?" Moody growled. His magical eye whirled around in his socket, peering at Snape. "Since somebody can't find

out where the Dark Lord is hiring out, we could see if the assassin had any connections to third-party sources.”

“Excuse me, Alastor, for feeling the need to avoid torture because of my prying nature,” Snape spat out. The dark wizard glared at the grizzled ex-Auror. “I am no use to you dead.”

“You’re barely any use to us now!” Alastor scoffed.

Snape glowered at the crippled Auror as Dumbledore sighed and raised a placating hand. “Now, now,” he said mildly. “Please remember that we are all on the same side here. If we do not work together, then rest assured that Voldemort has already won half the battle.”

An awkward silence filled the room and Harry was amused to see Alastor Moody, the veteran of who-knows how many battles and wars, looking sheepish at the gentle chiding. Inwardly, he marvelled at the influence Dumbledore held over these normal witches and wizards.

“Anyway, there’s no body,” Harry said, his voice drifting over the silent room. “Now all of you bugger off. I want to speak to Dumbledore alone.”

“Please,” Dumbledore said, halting the objections before they had started. His eyes twinkled as he gazed around the table. “As abrupt as Harry is, he is nonetheless correct. I need to speak with him on matters of vital importance.”

“We were just finishing, anyway,” a mild-looking man with greying hair stated. His amber eyes gazed unnervingly at Harry, riveted to the boy as soon as he had stepped through the door.

The occupants of the room shuffled out, most of them casting curious glances at the two powerful wizards. As the last of them left the kitchen, Dumbledore spoke up.

“Nymphadora? Would you mind waiting outside for a few moments?”

The short, spunky-looking witch turned her head and nodded chirpily. She disappeared through the door and Dumbledore slammed it shut with a wave of his wand. With a small flick, Harry felt numerous privacy spells blanket the room.

“So what’s the deal with the hand?” Harry asked bluntly, leaning back in his chair. “It looks like somebody like, well, me, got to it.”

Dumbledore looked pensive and ignored Harry’s question as he whipped his wand over the table. Cups of steaming hot chocolate and a platter of delicious-looking scones appeared before them.

“How were your holidays, Harry?” he inquired politely, picking up his mug and taking a sip. Frothy hot chocolate splayed all over his beard and Harry shuddered at the sight, looking disgusted.

“They were fine,” Harry replied shortly. He paused. “They might have been better if people had stopped trying to kill me.”

“Yes, that does tend to put a damper on the festivities,” Dumbledore agreed with a pleasant smile. Something flashed in his wizened eyes and he regarded Harry carefully. Leaning forward, he steeped his hands together and asked, “And what of your daughter? What of Amaris?”

“Gone,” Harry answered, and his lazy smile disappeared. He frowned and his next words came out almost wistfully. “Back to her Mother.”

“Ah, yes,” Dumbledore said airily. “The Lady Maeve, youngest of the Sidhe Queens of Winter.”

“I know who she is, Dumbledore,” Harry said dryly. “I did have sex with her, after all. Good sex, great sex, even. Well,” he amended. “Great for me. I really don’t care if she liked it.”

“I assure you, Harry, I have no interest in, what I’m sure is, your remarkable love life,” Dumbledore answered. He smiled politely as Harry shrugged and took a sip from his mug.

“I’m sure you know why I’m here,” Harry said carefully.

"Voldemort," was all Dumbledore had to say.

"Unfinished business and all that rot," Harry said, smiling contently. He leaned back in his chair and shuffled his feet. "There I am, trying to enjoy my holidays, and that bastard is inconsiderate enough to send people out to kill me. What's worse, they sucked. I mean, c'mon! Get it right."

"You wish to defeat him," Dumbledore stated. "Revenge is a powerful motivator, I must admit."

"Defeat? No," Harry answered. Dark fire flickered at the back of his eyes and for a moment he looked positively evil. "Tear apart and rip into pieces with my own hands, sure."

"I see."

"The thing is, I don't know what's going on," Harry admitted frankly, and scowled. "I was on holidays, you see, until they got interrupted."

"So you have said," Dumbledore said amiably. He stroked his beard, his light-blue gaze eying Harry thoughtfully. "You want information and you believe I can give it to you."

"C'mon, Dumbledore," Harry protested. "Remember the prophecy? I don't want to live the rest of my life- and trust me when I say I'm going to be around for a while, being immortal and all- with this fucker living beside me. Let's finish this little war right now. Give me his location, we'll rally all the fighters we can and turn Voldemort into a pile of oozing sludge that we can all point at and laugh."

"Alas, Harry, it is not as easy as that," Dumbledore said heavily. "Lord Voldemort hides himself well, coming out of the shadows only to strike and retreating soon after. There have been killings. Madame Bones, the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, killed in the very Ministry itself. Ms Vance, one of my own, murdered in her home. Innocent muggles, caught up in a war they cannot even begin to understand."

“So he’s started,” Harry said softly. He narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. “Head of law enforcement, eh? That’s a blow to morale, losing that much leadership and experience.” He paused, his brows furrowed in thought. “It’s what I’d do, but I’d keep it up. I’d kill her replacement as well, and the replacement after that and so forth, until nobody wants the job. That takes out a major cog in your ability to defend yourself.”

“One of Lord Voldemort’s more insidious strategies,” Dumbledore said. His voice was very soft and calm as he stared down at Harry from behind his half-moon glasses. “You think much like him.”

“Well, we’re both evil bastards,” Harry said with a shrug.

Together, the two of them sat in silence for a few moments. Dumbledore sipped his hot chocolate, looking completely content to let the silence drag out. Harry, however he may have grown, fidgeted in his seat until he could take no more.

“Okay,” he said loudly, dropping his mug onto the table with a loud thump. “We need a plan. Remember that time last year, where you commented on my flexible morality? I think it’s time we put it to good use.”

“What do you mean, Harry?” Dumbledore asked quietly. The resignation in his eyes, however, belied the fact that the old wizard knew exactly what the Denarian was talking about.

“Give me a list of names and where to find them,” Harry said calmly, as if talking about something as trivial as grocery shopping. “They’ll be dead within a week, two at most.”

“Ah, Harry,” Dumbledore sighed. He looked incredibly ancient at that moment, and for all the Headmaster’s immense power Harry saw a wearied old man beneath it.

He kind of liked what he was seeing, too. Not that he had anything against Dumbledore, but he felt distinctly uncomfortable around anybody who stood a chance at defeating him.

“What?” Harry asked crossly. “This is a war, isn’t it? People die in wars. All we need to do is make sure that more of them die than us.”

“Leaving that particular moral debate aside, it is much harder than you realise,” Dumbledore said heavily. “Frankly, the most dangerous Death Eaters that need eliminating are those that can’t be found. Most are escapees from Azkaban, deranged and utterly loyal to Lord Voldemort. Before you can remove them...”

“Kill them, you mean,” Harry interjected softly, a slight smile playing at the corner of his lips. “Personally, I prefer the term ‘murder.’ Before I can ‘murder’ them...”

“...you need to be able to find them,” Dumbledore finished. The tightening of his eyes was the only reaction Harry got out of him. “You are doing your best to make this as uncomfortable and awkward as possible, aren’t you?”

“I try,” Harry said blandly. “I’d come up with more witty comments and snappy lines, but I’m still in the holiday mood and, frankly, sometimes you really need to strain your brain to think them up.”

“The Order is running numerous operations to determine where Lord Voldemort has situated his forces,” Dumbledore continued, smiling ever so slightly at Harry’s antics. “We have sent emissaries to potential allies of Voldemort’s cause, asking them to stay out of the approaching conflict. Several known Death Eater sympathisers or low-level...minions, for lack of a better word...”

“Accomplice?” Harry suggested.

“That works,” Dumbledore agreed with a nod. He adjusted his long, pointed wizard’s hat back on his head. “We have some under surveillance. I would like you to lead some of these operations.”

“You know, subtlety isn’t my strong point,” Harry said, barely wincing at the idea. “I’ve...never been good at sneaking around.”

“It is what comes afterwards that I will need your...talents,” Dumbledore said quietly, with resolved determination. “They...will not

talk under our normal interrogation methods and I do not want to ask this of one of my Order.”

“But you have no problem asking me?”

“I know what you are,” Dumbledore breathed softly. His eyes were filled with unimaginable regret and resolve. He closed them and took a deep breath. “You will not hesitate to do what is needed to be done. Others will.”

Harry was silent.

“I have lived through many a war,” Dumbledore said, avoiding Harry’s eyes and staring at the top of the table as if it held great mysteries of magic within it. “Lord Voldemort’s reign of terror was the worse, the most horrible. Perhaps not in terms of loss of life, but in the war of the heart, we were almost crushed. Fear, paranoia, distress, anguish- the last time almost saw the Wizarding World break. I... will not let that happen again.”

A slow smile curved Harry’s lips as he stared at Dumbledore with a sense of renewed admiration.

“At least some of your kind have some balls,” he said and chuckled. “Alright. I’ll get you your information- and I’ll get you their heads as well.”

Dumbledore merely nodded gravely.

“No, seriously,” Harry said, gesturing beyond the kitchen door. “We can mount them on the wall there with funny little plaques underneath them. Hey, we can have a contest! Who can get their Death Eater to make the funniest face before we kill them! It’ll be fun.”

“I daresay that while Sirius would approve on principle, I do not think he wants more garbage littering his house,” Dumbledore said amusedly. He stood up, gingerly raising his blackened arm and tucking it into his purple robes. “I have one more thing to ask of you, Harry.”

"Alright," Harry agreed. "I'm a little doubtful about it, but hey, if you bring the lube, I'll bring the leather. Just don't mind when I jump ship and let good old Meciél take over."

"Harry," Dumbledore sighed. For a moment it looked like he was straining himself not to roll his eyes. "I would like you to come to Hogwarts in three days, then come by once a week."

"Um....no," Harry concluded flatly.

"There is still more you need to learn," Dumbledore stated firmly.

"Not from there," Harry scoffed. "Schoolyard magic isn't going to help me where I'll be going."

"Oh, I agree," Dumbledore said lightly. "That is why I've decided that I will personally tutor you from here on. I've taken the time to gather some valuable information that I feel will be most beneficial to you. There is still much you need to know."

"Personal tutoring?" Harry repeated. He stared up at Dumbledore carefully, and a wide grin came over his face. "Bribery... nice, I like it."

"Incentive, would be the correct term," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling.

He flicked his wand and the dishes disappeared from the table without a sound. Dumbledore tucked the wand back into his robes. He snapped his fingers and the door clicked, blowing open with a low creaking noise.

"Nymphadora, if you could please enter?" he called out cheerfully.

"Do you have to call me that?" the young witch grumbled as she stalked back into the room.

Harry took the time to appraise her. She was fairly beautiful, for a normal, run-of-the-mill wand-wizard. Her short cropped hair had been dyed a vibrant pink, three earrings laced her left ear and her bust was

nicely contained within a 'Weird Sisters' shirt beneath her crimson Auror robes. Harry didn't know what the weird sisters were, but he was hoping that it was some kind of Wizarding porn group specialising in incest.

"Depravity is fun," he murmured out loud.

"What?" the witch said. She stared at him in amused confusion. "So you're Potter, huh. I've suppose I've got you to thank for knocking me on my arse at the Leaky Cauldron that time?"

"And what a nice arse is was," Harry said with a lecherous grin. It didn't fade, even as Tonk groaned. "Who were you again?"

"The Auror that came to apprehend the big, bad Death Eater," Tonks said sourly.

"Oh, right," Harry said. He gave her a wink. "You were Dumbledore's sex life. Instantly short and painful to participate in."

"I love your wit," Tonks deadpanned, not looking impressed. "It's somewhere up there in the ranks of Voltaire and Ravenclaw."

"I just got back from holidays. Give a handsome, roguish and sexy man a break!" Harry groaned.

"Harry," Dumbledore interjected, looking amused at the byplay between the two. "This is Nymphadora Tonks..."

Harry gave a strangled cough as Tonk muttered 'Don't call me that!'

"Is something funny?" Tonk demanded, whirling on him.

"Your name," Harry chuckled and shook his head in amusement. "Nymphadora. Reminds me of..."

"If you say the sex joke, you'll regret it!" Tonks snapped. Her hair shimmered from pink to black and she brandished her wand in front of his face. "I know how to give boys like you a nasty rash on 'little Harry' that won't go away anytime this century."

"Your wand contracted an STD?" Harry asked and gave a mocking gasp of shock. "Nymphadora! What do you do to yourself when you're alone?"

Tonks stared at him for a full moment, before bursting out into peals of laughter. She clapped Harry on the back and he grinned up at her smugly.

"I'm going to like you," she said cheerfully. "It's good to meet a man who gives as good as he gets."

"But..." she continued. "If you ever call me Nymphadora, I will kill you."

"I'm leaning how to push some of your buttons," Harry commented and paused. "Obviously, not the buttons I'd like to push- but buttons all the same."

"If I may have your attention now?" Dumbledore asked quietly.

Tonks nodded, suddenly looking sheepish. Harry rolled his eyes at her behaviour but motioned for the Headmaster to continue.

"Harry here will be accompanying you later tonight," Dumbledore told Tonks. The Auror nodded, her gaze flickering towards Harry speculatively. "As of now, I am allowing him full access to our information. He will also be in charge of the operation."

"Okay," Tonks started, looking confused and a little annoyed. "I understand he's really good, but don't you want an experienced Auror to take charge if things go sour?"

"I would prefer if your involvement in this were as little as possible," Dumbledore said gravely. "There are things I wish to protect you from that I have no qualms in having Harry handle. Rest assured, I have placed my trust in him. He will not disappoint you."

"Alright," Tonks agreed slowly. She shrugged carelessly and her smile reappeared. "You're the boss."

"Thankyou," Dumbledore said gratefully. He yawned and glanced down at a pocket watch. "I believe it is time that I took my leave."

"Shoo!" Harry dismissed, making a swatting motion with his hand. "You're in the way between me and the sexy Auror."

"I will see you on Monday, Harry," Dumbledore said with a faint smile. "Say...half-past twelve?"

"Fine," Harry sighed.

"Mr Potter, Ms Tonks," Dumbledore bid farewell and strolled from the room.

The door closed again and Harry turned to Tonks, a smile playing at his lips.

"Alone at last," he said cheerfully. "This must be like a wet-dream come true for you."

"Has anybody told you that you're a perverted little boy?" Tonks asked with an incredulous grin, taking a seat on the other side of the kitchen table.

"All the time," Harry answered with a nod. "But she's a woman, so I just tell her to shut up and go and make me a sandwich or something-Ow!"

"What's wrong?" Tonks asked, looking concerned.

"Head pain," Harry said through gritted teeth, clutching at his head with his hand. "It was just a joke!" he hissed softly.

"What?"

"So what are we doing?" Harry asked, tactfully changing the subject.

"There's a man who we think is supplying a small enclave of Death Eaters with material," Tonks said, her tone becoming brisk and

business-like. "He's been buying extraordinary amounts of food, potion ingredients, minor talismans and the sorts. All the sorts of things a group of hiding Death Eaters would need."

"So we go in and nab the guy and get him to tell us where they are?" Harry asked with a cocked eyebrow.

"Pretty much," Tonks agreed. "Every Saturday night, he visits a shady pub at the corner of Knocturn and Uptwist Alley. We'll sneak in, see if we can glean any last minute information from his actions then arrest him when he leaves."

"Sounds like a plan," Harry said. He frowned. "Dumbledore didn't tell you much about me, did he?"

"Not really," Tonks admitted. "I don't know much about you apart from your awesome prowess with your wand- nice work at the Department of Mysteries, by the way- and that you are a complete and utter arsehole."

"Thank you," Harry said sincerely, grinning. "The thing is, I don't really play by the rules."

"That, Potter, is the worst come on line I've ever heard," Tonks said dryly.

"If I wanted to come on to you, I'd say something like 'Nice legs, what time do they open?' or 'Nice tits, can I have a squeeze?'" Harry commented. "Admittedly, not elegant, but it gets the point across."

Tonks laughed.

"No, what I mean to say is that I do stuff that gets most people arrested and executed," Harry finished, his smile dimming.

"So I've heard," Tonks said, raising her eyebrows.

"Just keep that in mind when I do my thing," Harry finished with a loud yawn and stood up. "I'll meet you here at...what time?"

“Nine will do,” Tonks answered.

“Alright,” Harry said, looking both bored and a tad tired. He walked forward and opened the kitchen door, pausing at the threshold. “Remember what I said.” He started forward, his voice growing distant. “I have enough people after my head at the moment without the Ministry or the Order.”

The front door opened and slammed shut.

A/N: Sorry for the long wait. It's a busy semester, but I managed to sneak out a chapter when my homework wasn't looking. Thanks to those at DLP for their reviews and help.

"...and as you can see, there is some water damage on the floorboard here," the real estate agent pointed out, a grimace barely contained on her attractive face. She looked rather unenthusiastic as she led Harry around the dingy three-roomed apartment, either because her client was so young or because the place was, well, a shit-hole.

"I see," Harry said vaguely.

It was only a few hours after the meeting with the Order of Phoenix, and Harry had decided that getting a new base of operations was essential to his plans. Well, Meciél had decided to think of it like that. Harry had just wanted somewhere to sleep.

The Denarian cast a careful eye around the small room, appraising the ceilings and wall. The real estate lady was probably convinced that he was assessing the condition of the paint and plaster, when in fact his trained magical eyes were already mapping out potential location for warded defences. The Denarian was by no means an expert on casting defensive runes, but he knew enough to give any potential home crashers a big bang should they feel inclined to attack- again.

"Well, you've convinced me," Harry said with a smile as fake as his ID. The real estate agent paused in midsentence and turned to him, looking confused.

"I'll take it," Harry clarified and reached into his pockets. He pulled out a cheque- courtesy of his new bank account, where the last of his savings had been invested in just a few hours ago. "How much?"

"You do realise that there is no electricity?" the real estate agent prodded. "The wirings completely shot. You'll have to go into the wall and get it replaced, and that'll be expensive."

“Yeah, I got that,” Harry said dryly, his eye glancing up at the dead light bulbs. It was one of the reasons why he was so interested- there’d be no mucking about with the power company when his magical defences blew out every light bulb and TV set in the whole building.

“And you don’t have any hot water,” the woman continued. She was middle-aged with the features you might find on the average suburban mother. “The gas heater broke down before the last tenant was mur- left.”

Harry ignored the slip, still smiling politely. The woman had no idea that he had been the one to kill the man- an aspiring dark wizard who had attacked him numerous times during his involuntary participation of the Triwizard Tournament.

“That’s alright,” Harry said and a lecherous grin crossed his face. “I need a lot of cold showers or else I’ll wear myself out on the hordes of women that try to jump my bones.”

The woman’s face flickered with disgust and embarrassment as Harry wrote down a suitable five-numbered figure and passed it over to her. It was the last of his savings, so he hoped that she would take it and leave. Otherwise, he’d have to use his wand to persuade her and that kind of mental manipulation magic would be dead easy for any competent Denarian to spot.

“Are you sure?”

‘Why the hell did I have to meet a conscience-abiding real-estate agent?’ Harry thought in irritation. ‘Take the damn money and piss off, you stupid cow!’

‘I’m quite impressed that you didn’t say that to her face,’ Meciél intruded.

Something must have shown on his face because any doubts that the woman had about taking his money fled her mind and she pocketed the check with a insincere smile. Twenty minutes and a dozen forms

later, Harry was the proud owner of a dingy, damp apartment, complete with it's own mice and...

"Cockroaches," Harry muttered in disgust. He stared down at the chipped and cracked shower basin, watching the twitching insects scurrying around. He whipped out his wand and a flash of boiling wind blasted from the tip. The cockroaches scattered back into the wall, leaving Harry feeling vaguely satisfied.

"So what's our first plan?" He asked out loud.

Meciel's illusion appeared in the living room as he walked back in, a frown of disgust on her beautiful features. Unlike Harry, the Fallen was much more selective about her living conditions. Nonetheless, Meciel forced her distaste down and turned to Harry with a warm smile.

"We need information," Meciel answered as Harry waved his wand around, directing his luggage and shrunken furniture to various places around the room. She raised a hand and stroked his cheek affectionately. "We will have our revenge soon, my little host."

"I'm taller than you," Harry grumbled. "And I have a bigger penis. So don't go around calling me little."

Meciel rolled her eyes in fond exasperation.

"I am not even able to express affection without you..." she started, before pausing. Absolute revulsion swept across her face and her illusion was gone in an instant.

"What's the..." Harry started, before he too felt the little itch at the back of his mind and groaned. "Oh, come on! This is the fifth one in three days!" He turned his head and glared at the cane-sheathed sword lying in the corner, along with a pile of his crinkled clothes.

The sword glimmered with a silvery light.

"No!" Harry snapped.

He gave the inanimate piece of metal the finger and turned back to organising his new home, his wave expanding and banishing a couch to the other end of the room- continually facing away from the doorway. He made a mental note to cast a few defensive spells on it, in case he ever needed it for cover. Light glinted in the corner of his eye and Harry glanced back at the sword, which was glowing with a reproachful light

"Persistent fucker, isn't he?" Harry muttered under his breath.

'Are we talking about the Sword of the Cross or the Almighty?'

"Dunno," Harry answered, staring at the sword closely.

The light was glaring from beneath the blade's wooden sheath, bathing the room in a soft silver glow. Despite everything, Harry suddenly got the feeling that the light was disgusted with him. Perhaps the sword itself had a kind of sentience or perhaps it was merely expressing the opinion of its Master- either way, Harry was stoked that somehow, somewhere, the divine was pissed off at him.

Suddenly there was a loud, piercing scream from right outside his window. Harry's wand was raised and dark fire spluttered from the tip before the scream had died down, his eyes narrowed and his posture tense. The silver glow of the sword only grew more insistent, as did the itching in the back of his mind.

"Oh, c'mon!" Harry protested as he glanced out of the window and stared down at the alleyway below. It was five stories down, but his sharp eyes picked out a young brunette shrieking and scrambling away from a huge, bulky man. "This is my house! You can't do that around here!"

'Yes, I certainly agree. Take her across the street and rape her over there, just as long as we can't hear it.' Meciell said dryly, and Harry couldn't tell if she was being sarcastic or not.

"Not that!" Harry snapped with a scowl. He gestured at the sword. "That!"

The light that radiated from the blade could only be described as having shades of smugness to it. The woman screamed again and Harry winced as it seemed to resonate with the itch in the back of his head, making it pound throughout his head painfully. With a low, uttered growl, Harry grabbed the blade and turned on his heels, disappearing with a sharp crack.

Harry reappeared in the alley, behind the large bulky man and the woman, who had fallen down to the ground and was trembling in fear as she stared up at her attacker. With a loud, irritated sigh, Harry stepped forward and channelled Hellfire into his arm. Blazing power shot through the limb, his skin growing blistering hot and smoke curdling from the tips of his fingernails. The man spun around as he heard Harry's footsteps and Harry caught a glimpse of mad, frenzied eyes before the Denarian cocked his fist back and slammed it in the man's face.

There was a flash of light and heat and the man screamed, skin blistering and melting. He was launched off his feet, the unnatural strength of the blow sending him soaring through the air down the alley and slamming him into a chain-linked fence. He crumpled to the ground, moaning and whimpering, while Harry turned to the shrieking woman with an irritated expression.

"Alright, yeah, we get it!" He snapped. "He was about to rape you! No need to scream like a damn banshee!"

The woman stopped shrieking and stared at him with awe. Her long blonde hair was muddied and her obviously expensive clothes were ripped and wet.

"You saved me," she breathed softly, staring up at him with wide blue eyes.

"No, I saved my eardrums," Harry grumbled, but suddenly took in how beautiful the woman was. He gave her an arrogant grin and offered her a hand. The woman was about to take it, smiling gratefully, when her eyes flickered past his head. She suddenly looked surprised and her lips parted in silent shock.

Harry turned his head and rolled his eyes as the other man stood up. His dark eyes were alight with rage and insanity, glaring at Harry from behind blistered skin. Blood trickled down his broken nose, past cracked teeth and a split lip and dribbling down on the rags he was using as clothes.

“You want more, eh?” Harry asked lazily. The sword on his back nagged at his mind, screaming absolute danger.

The man bellowed and charged at him, cocking his big, meaty fists. Harry’s eyes widened with mild surprise at the speed that the deranged would-be-rapist moved at, sidestepping in an instant and bringing out an arm. The man slammed into his arm and ignored the blow to the throat, swinging at Harry with wild flailing arms. Harry grunted as he was slugged in the face and staggered back, shaking his head to clear the flash of light from his eyes. With a vicious kick to the chest, Harry stopped the lunatic’s charge, slammed his knee into the man’s groin and threw him down to the ground. He raised his foot and smashed it down on the back of the man’s skull with as much force as possible, a wicked sneer crossing his face when he heard something crack. The man twitched and was then still, unconscious or dead.

The sword was still clattering on his back and Harry rolled his eyes. Did it really think Harry would fall to a piece of crap like that?

“You know, I sometimes forget how much fun it is to kick the crap out of somebody using nothing more than your bare hands,” Harry said casually, glancing over his shoulder. “You should try it some...” he trailed off as he met the woman’s suddenly-glowing eyes. Her hand was out in front of her, her fingers glowing with pure white energy.

It was only because of his enhanced-reflexes and quick mind that Harry avoided a fatal blow. He twisted his body sideways, leaning back even as his hands plunged into his pocket. The glowing fingers missed his heart by a few inches, glancing at his shoulder, and suddenly enormous pain roared through his body. Dark power crackled in his body as it raced down his arm, causing it to flop and flail uncontrollably. His wand fell to the ground with a clatter and the

metallic tang of blood filled his throat. Hellfire flashed through his body, combating the dark power unsuccessfully, as Harry jumped back and stared at the supposedly helpless woman with fury. Suddenly, the sword's distress made a lot more sense.

"A Denarian," Harry snarled, reaching to his back with his good arm.

Silver flame flashed along his glimmering blade and the woman halted. She flicked her long blonde hair over her shoulders and smiled at him saucily.

"Well, it wasn't the Knight I was expecting but that's alright," she said cheerfully. She glanced down at her 'attacker' and caressed the man's head with her foot. "Uldriul is as faithful as ever. It's good to see that some things have stayed the same since my imprisonment."

"Uldriul," Harry repeated, while he subtly tested out his wounded arm. It had gone still but wouldn't move, even as Hellfire rushed to repair the immense damage the single tap had done to it.

'A psychotic Denarian,' Meciell answered grimly. 'A servant of a Denarian named Berriviel, which I assume would be the woman in front of us. She's a powerful assassin, her very touch able to kill even the strongest of wizards or hosts.'

"I am Berriviel," the woman introduced herself, taking a few steps forward and raising her hand.

Harry eyed it with distaste and the blonde grinned mischievously.

"Well, you can't blame me for trying," she said with a chuckle. "You must be the Denarian Renegade that I've heard so much about."

Harry didn't say anything, more than willing to keep her talking as his innate regenerative powers worked to restore the full functionality of his arm. His wand lay at Berriviel's feet but he doubted he could summon it without the other Denarian intercepting it.

"You're quite famous, you know," Berriviel mentioned casually. "You were all I was hearing about when I woke up; the traitor Meciell and her wand-wizard host, the one who killed Nicodemus and Vesper."

"Woke up?" Harry questioned, cocking his head and smiling arrogantly. He had shoved any doubt or fear he may have had to the far corner of his mind, fully concentrated on the task ahead. "Don't tell me you're one of those pathetic fools that got themselves caught by the Knights of the Cross."

Berriviel's smile disappeared.

"Yes, well," she muttered, looking embarrassed. "It's why I'm here now. Although, of all of the Knights of the Cross to fall into my trap, you were the last I was expecting. It is true, isn't it? You are a Knight of the Cross? You are a Denarian using the powers of that old fucker to kill his own kind?"

"Right in one," Harry said cheerfully. His arm was twinging painfully, which meant that he was getting some sensation back to his limb. "How'd you do this, by the way? It hurts like hell."

"Quite simply, really," the woman said casually, although she looked pleased with herself. "The body send and receives instructions through the nervous system through chemically-induced electrical impulses. If you know what you're doing, then it's quite easy to disrupt and destroy these impulses- and the tissues around them."

"I'm...impressed," Harry said with a nod of his head. The sword in his hands pulsed with silver flame as he stared down at the beautiful blonde, dozens of scenarios popping up in his head.

"So am I. I never expected you to dodge like that. I suppose it's to be expected from the host of a Denarian Lord." Berriviel said and grinned at him. "They always were the most powerful. Have you regained movement in your arm yet? That is why you're stalling for time, right?"

“Somewhat,” Harry admitted and his arm twitched. “But don’t accuse me of stalling. Don’t think I haven’t noticed this mist that’s sprung up like this. You’ve been busy.”

“Ah, busted,” the woman said with a snap of her fingers. A thick mist had slowly been gathering around the alley, blocking off the view from the buildings and the street.

“You know, I think I could have liked you,” Harry said honestly.

“Not really,” Berriviel disagreed, smiling at Harry impishly. “After all, I’m only an illusion. I’m actually about to kill you from behind.”

There was a pause as Harry digested that and his eyes widened as his advanced senses detected movement from behind him. He spun around, his sword arcing up in a flash of silver flame. Berriviel appeared from the mist, her hand glowing with white power as she dodged the blade and closed in on him. She thrust the glowing hand and slammed it into his head, just as Harry brought the blade back and sliced her in two. Harry blinked as her blow did nothing and Berriviel stared at him, her eyes filled with satisfaction, even as she disappeared in a puff of mist.

She was an illusion, which meant that Harry had just turned his back on a dangerous opponent.

“Accio!” Harry roared, spinning around again and mentally cursing the blonde-haired bitch as the Berriviel that had been talking to him leaped towards him with impressive strength, closing the distance in a flash.

Her left arm parried his sword arm, glowing white energy slamming into his nerves with a sensation approaching agony and causing him to drop the blade. She extended two fingers of her right hand, white power glinting at the tip, and prepared to slam it into his throat- when his previously wounded hand shot up and smashed her in the face. Hellfire roared from his open palm and Berriviel shrieked as she was thrown back. Harry caught the wand, which was sailing through the air, and levelled it at her.

“Exturbo Arduro!” He bellowed. Hellfire roared into his wand and a flash of searing heat ripped up the granite ground as he blasted towards Berriviel.

Even as the other Denarian was falling, however, she twisted her body in a series of acrobatic contortions that Harry would have been happy to see on any other day. Somehow, she avoided most of the widespread blast, disappearing into the mist. Harry heard a whoosh of wind from behind him and raised his wand.

“Tutamen atra flamma!” he snapped.

Dark power roared through him and his wand glowed crimson as dark fire burst from the tip in a fiery lasso of scarlet and purple flame. The fire spiralled around him, lashing at the narrow walls and ground. Berriviel, who had appeared in the mist behind him, was struck by these spiralling loops of flame and gave a startled shriek as she was hurled off her feet. Harry whirled around, his hold on the fire disappearing as he levelled his wand at her.

“Avada Kedavra!”

Green light pooled at the tip of his wand and streaked forward, but Berriviel seemed to explode in a cloud of fog and the curse disappeared into the billowing cloud of mist that surrounded him. It exploded against something, he couldn’t see what, and Harry took control of the dissipating flames from before and reinforced them until they became wall of flames that surrounded him.

‘She will have the advantage as long as she can continue to keep you off balance,’ Meciell advised. ‘We may need...Harry, below you!’

Harry glanced down and his eyes widened as he saw the mist seeping through the cracks in the ground. He jumped back just in time as Berriviel exploded from the ground, reforming into physical form and attempting an uppercut of blinding white light that would have taken off his head. She was too close for an immediate spell, so Harry slammed his foot in her face and booted her away from. His wand followed her movement as he threw the spiralling flames at her. They surrounded her and enveloped her, crawling around her body

and licking at her clothes and skin, but Harry's keen ears heard the loud puff that signified her mist spell and knew that she had escaped.

"You're good," he said loudly. His right arm was still throbbing and his left arm had only begun to twitch again as he kept his eyes peered on the mist, awaiting his opponents next attack. "Not as good as I am, of course, but still rather skilled. You know that if I had a chance to recover from the surprise I would slaughter you, so you've kept me off-balance since the first blow."

There was no response and Harry frowned. On the ground by his feet, the sword of the cross flashed with silver flame and began to vibrate madly, clattering against the cracked granite loudly. Harry glanced down.

'It's sensing a strong demonic power,' Meciél said tensely. 'Be careful.'

"Eh, it takes more than..." Harry began, when something caught his eye.

His head shot to the left and for a split-second, he got a glimpse of Berriviel's demonic form. He had to admit, it was beautiful, resembling something of a floating stingray made up of a soft light glow. Mist rolled off its incorporeal body while a set of black eyes stared at him, a demonic sigil flaring with crimson Hellfire on its head. Then, it attacked.

Harry barely saw what happened. One moment, the creature was floating there and the next it was behind him. Pain wracked through him and mist wisped around his chest, crackles of electricity rolling off his clothes. The thing had rammed itself straight at and through him! Harry spun around- and this saved his life. He grunted in pain as it attacked again, lancing itself at his heart, missing by mere millimetres. It attacked again, this time aiming for the head, but Harry ducked and whipped up his wand.

Fiendfyre sprung to his call and a roaring mass of flames shot forward in a flock of fiery crows. They darted after Berriviel, who ducked inside the mist and reappeared on the other side- she must

have been using it as some kind of apparition. She charged at Harry again, but this time he was ready. With a flick of his feet, the Sword of the Cross was kicked up in the air as Berriviel raced at him. Silver fire flared as the demonic beast collided with the blade and a horrible echoing wail filled Harry's ears. He grinned madly, his weakened left hand clawing at the hilt, and he rammed the glowing blade right through the dazed demonic creature's chest.

The creature wailed again and Harry watched as mist poured off it, solidifying into human flesh. He ignored the wounds as Berriviel appeared again, a blonde-haired woman impaled on a blade right through her stomach. White power flared on her hands, but it faded away as the Sword of the Cross began to purge the demonic power from Berriviel's host body. Stunned eyes rose to meet his as Harry grinned cheekily, thrusting the sword in another couple of feet for good measure. Berriviel gasped, her eyes widening, and her limb relaxed. Slowly, her head lobbed forward, her eyes intent as they stared into Harry's. Suddenly, her arms shot out and gripped his head and before he knew it, her lips were on his.

For a split-second, Harry allowed the kiss, more out of surprise than anything else. Then, he jerked away as a horrible agonising pain filled his throat. Berriviel smiled at him, faint traces of ashen mist darting off her lips, as Harry gave a series of hacking coughs. His throat was on fire- it was burning and twisting, and the next cough splattered blood over Berriviel's pale cheeks. With a roar of fury, Harry twisted the blade in Berriviel's stomach and dragged it up, yanking it out of the Denarian's body with all of his strength. Berriviel fell, the life leaving her eyes, and she collapsed on Harry, sending both of them to the ground.

'Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!' Harry roared in his mind as he let out a series of hacking coughs. 'This fucking hurts! That stupid bitch!'

'I suppose it gives a new meaning to the phrase 'kiss of death',' Meciell added, sounding amused. Hellfire was already flaring in Harry's body, combating the latest damage.

‘Very helpful,’ Harry thought as the coughs died away. He glanced down at his hands, not surprised to see them coated with his own blood, then regarded the dead woman sprawled all over him.

“Be...” Harry started, before he let out a round of vicious coughs. He tried again, his voice a hoarse whisper. “Berriviel! Hey, are you dead?”

There was no response.

“Yeah, you’re dead,” Harry muttered, his voice almost silent.

He pushed Berriviel off of him and glanced around at his surroundings. The thick rolls of mist that had surrounded him were fading fast, revealing grime-covered walls and the occasional fire from Harry’s curses. However, movement caught his eye and Harry turned his head.

The other Denarian, Uldriul, the one that Harry assumed was dead, was standing before him. His face blistered, burned and bloodied beyond recognition, he had in his hands a large axe. He grinned at Harry maliciously, revealing broken and cracked teeth, his flattened nose leaking blood, mucus and cartilage.

‘Where the hell did he get that?’ Harry thought to Meciul in panic, his wounded arms fumbling for his wand as the man lifted the axe and prepared to bring it down on Harry’s exposed head. At the same time, large wings of gleaming bone exploded from Harry’s back, ready to impale the other man through the heart. Just as his fingers clasped warm wood and his wings of bone reared up, there was a silver flash of light.

Uldriul’s grin slackened and his bloodied eyes went blank as he collapsed on his knees, falling limply to the ground. A gleaming sword flashed with silver fire, removing the human blood staining its surface as two men appeared from the disappearing mist. Wrapped in large cloaks, a hint of chainmail gleaming from beneath one, the two Swords of the Cross looked inspiring and powerful as the mist rolled around them. They stared down at Harry with kind gazes, their large frames silhouetted against the mist.

"Theatrical bastards," Harry growled.

"Here we are...that does it now...open it up, Sanya...easy there, Harry," Michael commanded as he led Harry's battered form through the door of his new apartment.

"Get the hell off me," Harry grunted, feeling well enough to push Michael away from him.

He stood unsteadily on his two feet, his eyes half-closed in concentration as he surveyed the damage on his body. The nerves and muscles in his arms were almost healed, but there was some severe internal damage that Meciél was working on. His throat and mouth also burned, but there hadn't been as much power behind the kiss as there had been with her punches. Harry knew that if he hadn't been a Denarian Host, he would have been killed by these wounds. Hell, Dumbledore wouldn't have survived, or Voldemort.

Alright, maybe Voldemort would have lived. He was a surprisingly resilient bastard, from what Harry recalled.

"Are you sure you're alright, Harry?" Michael asked. His warm eyes were crinkled in concern but Harry ignored him as he collapsed on his couch. He glance up at the two Knights and frowned.

"What the hell are you guys doing here?" He demanded.

"Tracking Berriviel," Sanya answered quietly. A grim smile crossed his face. "We have been after her for quite some time and were preparing ourselves for an ambush. I think you took her out far easier than we would have. Quite frankly, I expected one of us to die in that battle."

"I knew it!" Harry growled, thumping his hand down on the couch. He glared at his gleaming Sword of the Cross, still stained with the blood of Berriviel. "There was no way in hell that that was a random encounter! I was set up!"

"He moves in mysterious ways," Michael said softly.

"I hate this job," Harry groaned with a disgusted sigh. He flicked his wand and a bottle of alcohol leaped into his hands. He didn't remember what it was exactly, but three of those had left him stone drunk in Hawaii. "Stupid manipulative hunk of crap."

His voice degenerated into a spew of insults, many that had Sanya choking and Michael appearing as flustered as Harry had ever seen him.

"Yes, well," Michael started, and then cleared his throat uncomfortably. "I suppose it's good that we caught up with you. I have information you need to know."

"Go on," Harry said, taking a chug of his drink and marvelling at the almost-burning sensations it produced in the pit of his stomach. Sure, Meciell could do the same thing but it was so much more fun with the real thing in his hand.

"Oh, by the way, I heard about Vesper," Sanya interjected and flashed Harry a smile. "Good work."

"I didn't do it for you lot, moron," Harry snapped, but preened a little under the praise. "Although I suppose it really was a good fight. Legendary comes to mind. Epic, even...an epic fight. I like the sound of that."

"Vesper's death came at the worse possible moment for the Order of the Blackened Denarius," Michael told him. He rubbed his beard as he continued. "Nicodemus' death almost split the rank of the Fallen. It was only through Vesper's status as one of the last Denarian Lords that kept them united. Now, they have fallen into disarray. Power blocs are forming and war looms on the horizon. Several of the Fallen were taken from our keeping. Berriviel was one of them."

"Denarian Lord," Harry repeated softly. "The other chick said something about that. What does that even mean?"

"You don't know?" Sanya asked in surprise.

“No, I do know, I just like asking dumb questions and making myself out to be a complete retard,” Harry snapped derisively. “Stupid commie...”

Sanya only looked amused.

“The Denarian Lords are the original Fallen who led the Order of Blackened Denarius during the organisation’s early days,” Michael explained patiently. “You have met all three of them- Anduriel, Vesper and Meciell. They were heavily involved with the Roman Empire, which is probably why feeding Christian to the lions became a national pastime.”

‘We just did that for the comedic effect,’ Meciell whispered, but otherwise stayed silent.

“Eventually, the Denarian Lords had a falling out, which coincidentally was around the same time as the fall of the Roman Empire,” Sanya continued on for Michael. “Why? Well, we don’t know. Our records are somewhat...limited. We only have rumours and hearsay to go on. Meciell became a renegade. Vesper’s crippling injuries saw her lose much of her status. Afterwards, it was Anduriel, and his new host, Nicodemus, that took control of the Order.”

“As much as I love ancient history- and I really don’t- what’s that got to do with anything now?” Harry asked.

“It doesn’t,” Michael answered.

“Well, there goes two minutes of my valuable time,” Harry remarked cheerfully.

“You’re a bit rude considering we just saved your life,” Sanya muttered, the tall Russian looking annoyed.

“Hey, I had him!” Harry snapped.

“So war is almost upon the Blackened Order,” Michael interjected peacefully. “They are gathering their resources in an attempt to strengthen themselves. Less than a week ago, a Denarian by the

name of Tessa, the host of Imariel, broke into one of our monasteries and liberated several of our captured coins...Harry?"

Harry could barely hear the other man. His vision had gone red and an utter fury shook him to the core rose up within Meciél. Hellfire burned his veins and for a moment, Harry was sure he had never felt Meciél feel so furious before in his life. Her hatred for this Tessa was matched only by Meciél's hatred of Nicodemus and Vesper.

"I'm fine," muttered Harry, waving away Michael's concerned gaze as Meciél retreated from her unintentional lapse, sealing herself away in his head tightly. "What's-her-face really, really, doesn't like Tessa."

"Ah," Michael said, trying and failing at sounding like he understood. He exchanged quick glances with Sanya, who shrugged, and turned back to Harry.

"Well, I suppose it fits," Harry said. He closed his eyes and scanned his wounds again, feeling pleased to note that they were almost functional again. It would take a few hours to heal, hopefully before the little assignment he had later that night.

"Fits with what?" Sanya asked from by the sink.

"My goals to utterly destroy the Order of the Blackened Denarius," Harry answered with a grim smile. "Oh, and that Voldemort prick too," he added.

"What?"

"Have you ever wondered why I got the sword?" Harry asked the two knights.

"It has been a subject of considerable interest between us," Sanya responded dryly.

"I have as well. At first I thought it was some kind of redemption crap, but now I don't think it is," Harry continued, the barest flickers of a chilling smile crossing his face. "I would bet my soul- if it were still mine- that the only reason this sword even tolerates me is because

I've started- and plan to continue- the decimation of the Order of Blackened Denarius."

Michael and Sanya were still.

"In other words, I'm God's hitter on this one," Harry concluded, looking pleased and satisfied. "I'm here to smite his enemies, and smite them good. They'll be smoted by my awesome smiting skills."

"You truly believe God views you like that?" It was hard to tell whether Michael's voice was full of sadness or pity.

Maybe it was both.

"I don't believe, I know," Harry said and leaned forward, his jaded green eyes meeting Michael's attentively. "Your God doesn't love me, Knight," he whispered coldly.

"What happens afterwards?" Sanya broke Harry and Michael's staring match. "What will you do then?"

"Then I'll no longer need the sword," Harry said. He paused and frowned. "Well, I might hold onto it until I kill Voldemort. After that, I'll destroy it for being a stupid piece of metallic horse-shit."

"Voldemort as well, eh?" Sanya asked with a strange smile. "You don't think you're overextending yourself?"

"I can juggle both of them," Harry said a tad defensively. "Just watch. I've even got a mission later today. I get to torture somebody. It'll be cool."

But Sanya wasn't paying attention anymore and had gone still. Kneeling by Harry's couch, Michael had also gone still, as if they could hear something that Harry couldn't. In unison, the two of them turned and faced the window, their eyes blank.

"Forgive us, Harry," Michael said as he stood. "But we have urgent business elsewhere."

“Orders are orders,” Sanya said, shrugging.

“Whatever,” Harry dismissed. “You’ve played your part in this little manipulative charade.”

“What do you mean?” Michael asked.

“Why do you think you’re here?” Harry asked them softly, a strange smile on his face. “Why do you think, here, of all places in London, the Denarian attacked the near apartment that I just have happened to own? Why do you think you were led there?”

“To save your life,” Michael responded evenly.

“Please, I had it under control,” Harry scoffed. “You’re here to tell me what I need to know, which you’ve just done know. You stayed here long enough for me to get the information I need, and then you’re off again. I may be a piece on the playing board here, but you’re mere pawns to my queen.”

He paused.

“No gay jokes, either. I thought it was a great analogy.”

Sanya left without another word while Michael stared at Harry calmly for full minute, before following his tall, Russian companion out. Harry closed the door with a flick of his wand, a pensive expression crossing his face.

“So you were a Denarian Lord, huh, one of the big shots?” He asked out loud. “What did they do to piss you off so much?”

He received no answer.

“I bet it was that time of the month or something.”

His left hand rose up and slapped him across the face.

“Bitch.”

'Brat.'

A/N: Well, I'm hoping that I can get a chapter out every weekend now, since I've dropped one of my subjects at uni to give myself more writing time. Well, I tell people that so that you can heap praise upon me for my dedication. I just hated the subject. Normally this would have been out on Sunday, but there was a plot-problem on the last scene that needed a couple days. Thank for those at DLP who helped with the last scene. I took all of your thoughts into consideration and altered it where I saw fit.

Edit: I removed the 'Denarian Lord' reference from chapter two. I completely forgot about it when I started Chapter 3 because of the long time between writing them. Thanks for those who picked it out.

Edit2: I forgot to fix the grammar mistakes before posting. I've done them now, but if you see anything give us a holler and I'll get on it. Thanks to RadioactiveBloke at DLP for his corrections.

Nymphadora Tonks would be the first to admit that she was feeling a little apprehensive about the upcoming mission. It had been almost twenty-four hours since Harry and Tonks had been assigned to the 'snatch and grab' operation. It rankled her that Potter had been given control of the operation over her. She was an Auror, for Merlin's sake! Sure, Potter was powerful, she wasn't denying that. Nobody who had ever seen him in action would deny that. But she didn't think he had the right temperament to take responsibility of a delicate operation such as this. She ignored the whisperings of her conscience that were telling her that this operation was in clear violation of Auror protocol and Ministry Law- the Ministry was fumbling blindly with the issue of You-Know-Who. Only by working with Dumbledore could she prevent the destruction of the magical world she loved - even if it meant joining an illegal vigilante group.

Tonks may have been lost in thought as she stood in the brightly-lit kitchen at No. 12 Grimmauld Place, but she wasn't an Auror for nothing. Somebody was sneaking up behind her. Tonks made no apparent movement, her training and experience even keeping her muscles from reflexively tensing up, until the person was standing right behind her. In a blur of movement, her wand flew into her hand and she spun around, readying a chain of the Auror-Nine. The Auror-Nine were select Auror-Class spells that could be chained together

through wand movements and incantations, where one wand movement led to another and the last syllable of an incantation led to the first syllable of the next. They were very effective in overwhelming an opponent...if there was one there, of course.

The hallway leading to the foyer was empty and Tonks frowned, suddenly feeling very foolish as she stood there with her wand out. Sighing, she tucked it back into her robes and suppressed a scowl. This stupid house always gave her the chills and now it was making her paranoid. Suddenly, there was a rustling of fabric from behind her and a warm breath on her ear.

"Wotcher doing, cute stuff?" somebody whispered.

Tonks restrained the urge to shriek like a little girl. Instead, her leg flew up and lashed out behind her, instinctively going for the crotch. The person behind her grunted as he dodged, allowing Tonks to whirl around with fire brewing in her eyes.

"Godammit, Potter!" she snarled, brandishing her wand at an amused-looking teenager. "Don't do that!"

Harry cocked an eyebrow and grinned at her, not looking bothered by her anger at all. In fact, he reached forward and flicked her on the nose.

"Has anybody told you that you're incredibly sexy when you're pissed off?" Harry remarked. He cocked his head, frowning thoughtfully. "Now that I think about it, you'd probably be even sexier if you had no clothes on. Wink, wink, nudge, nudge, if you know what I mean."

"You're not meant to say wink..." Tonks started, then sighed and rolled her eyes. She adopted a beautiful smile and beckoned at Harry with one hand. "Well, I suppose we have a bit of time. I could show you what I look like underneath these robes."

"Really?" Harry asked, his eyes widening with surprise and delight.

"No," Tonks snapped. "Now hurry up and tell me what you've got planned. We only have a little bit of time left!"

"Well, I was thinking that we could run in, grab the guy, killed anybody who got in our way, shout something about retribution and the dark lord and run out," Harry told her. He scratched his head. "That way, everybody will blame the Death Eaters and we get off scot free."

"You do realise that this is supposed to be a clandestine operation?" Tonks demanded. She had the sudden urge to smack her forehead and groan when Harry looked at her blankly. "Clandestine. It means secret, subtle, stealthy..."

"I know what it means," Harry snapped irritably. "My idea is just better."

"If it's alright with you, sir," Tonks continued sarcastically. "Then maybe we could fall back to the plan we had to start with."

"We had a plan?"

Tonks screwed up her face and Harry looked impressed as she began to change. Short, pink hair grew, lengthened and tied itself into a braid of brunette hair. Large blue eyes shrunk into beady, brown eyes that looked as if they had a permanent squint to them. In a few seconds, Tonks had seemingly morphed from Auror to nondescript, boring woman. Harry surveyed her carefully. There was nothing remotely attractive about her now, but there wasn't also anything that would make him double-back, even if it was for a giggle. She was...average, which Harry supposed was the point.

"That was cool," Harry remarked. Suddenly, a thought occurred to him and he grinned with excitement. "Say, can you transform your looks into anything? I only ask because of the whole sexual kink that we could get out of it."

Tonks sent him a strange look as she checked herself over. Looking satisfied, she whipped her wand through the air a few times and summoned a large duffel bag to the kitchen table. Inside were robes and clothes in a range of different bland colours.

“We infiltrate the bar, gather any information we can and take out our target when he leaves,” Tonks said. Her voice had changed as well, become slower, duller. “This way, there’ll be minimal resistance and we can establish a persona in case we need to stake out the place later on. Now, all we need to do is to give you a disguise and...”

Tonks had glanced up and her worlds had trailed off. Standing before her was a stunning woman, tall, slender and dressed in white and silver robes. Silver eyes stared down at her imperiously, dark hair glinted with some kind of inner light and her very posture screamed of majesty. It was a haunting beauty, one that took Tonk’s breath away as feelings of awe bombarded her mind.

“Potter?” Tonks muttered in awe.

“Well, illusions are becoming one of my specialities, you know,” the woman purred. She smiled at Tonks sensuously and stroked the Auror on the arm, sending tingles of warmth up the older woman’s spine. “It’s quite real, isn’t it? She really is the most beautiful woman I’ve seen before, although she’s not too happy that I can do this- even if this is just a pale comparison of her true looks.”

“It is, but that’s not what I was going to say,” Tonks said, breathing deeply. She closed her eyes and concentrated. When she opened them again, they were burning with anger. “What I wanted to say was...don’t fuck around with my mind like that again!”

“Oh?” the woman uttered and smiled. The feelings bombarding Tonk suddenly stopped, although the woman’s beauty didn’t diminish at all. The woman took a step back, a mischievous smile crossing her face that Tonks could recognise as looking more on place on Harry rather than anybody else. “You fought off the glamour? Not bad. Perhaps Dumbledore was right. Perhaps you’re not totally incompetent as I thought you were.”

“I am an Auror,” Tonks replied stiffly, emphasizing her rank with a cold glare. “I am trained to recognise external stimuli and on how to counter them. Now, drop that illusion and choose something more discrete. We don’t want to draw any attention to ourselves and that is hardly inconspicuous.”

“Man,” the woman sighed, rolling her eyes. She disappeared silently, without a flash of glimmer or anything, and standing her place was Harry, who looked glum. “You know, when I met you I thought you would be fun. I also thought you were sexy as hell. So far, you’ve only shown to me that you have great sexual potential.”

“What?” Tonk asked, looking bewildered. She stopped, huffed and glared at him. “Well, I’m sorry for disappointing your obviously high standards. But there’s a time for playing and mucking about and there’s time to be serious and get our work done.”

“Smart people like me can mix the two,” Harry grumbled. He flicked his wand, absently muttering incantations as he wove an incredibly complex illusion around himself.

Tonks watched him, looking impressed. She knew of the charm that he was using, an incredibly difficult spell that only a few wizards and witches she knew could do. The illusion wrapped itself around the user like a second skin, moving as it moved to cover up the gaps that were commonly seen when wizards tried to pass themselves taller than they really were with lesser charms. It also needed quite a bit of power behind it, since it created something akin to a physical barrier to create the appearance of mass where there wasn’t. A short wizard like Flitwick could use this charm to appear four times as tall as he was, and there would be no way to tell from casual touch- to a point. Most wizards didn’t bother trying to master this spell. Self-Transfiguration and certain potions required a lot less effort and worked just as well. The fact that Harry could do something like that said a lot about his skills.

“Is this better?” Harry asked Tonks when he was finished.

His appearance had transformed to that of a middle-aged man with scruffy brown hair and a lean face. There was a cruel tilt to his chin and his eyes were filled with barely restrained malice. Harry just loved the irony of it, really. He had stolen the former black wizard’s apartment, now he was stealing his face.

"You look like a sociopath," Tonks said bluntly. "Then again, considering where we're visiting, that might be a good thing."

"I am a sociopath," Harry muttered under his breath, drawing an odd glance from the Auror.

"What was that?" Tonks asked as she led them out of the kitchen and towards the fireplace in the living room.

"I said 'nice arse'," Harry said blandly.

"Pervert," Tonks snapped.

"Damn proud of it too," Harry said with a grin.

Less than an hour later, Harry found himself in one of the coolest pubs he had ever been in. Granted, he could tick off the number of pubs he had been in on one hand, but this beat the others down with ease. He leaned back on his curse-burned chair, watching his surroundings with keen interest while his illusionary head remained bent down over his grimy pint of some foul-smelling alcohol. The walls were peeling with faded yellow paint, which said something about what went on here considering the number of preserving properties of magical paint. One possible source of the deterioration was the sheer amount of smoke that lingered in the air, creating a murky and, most importantly, revolting stench that lingered in the air. The origin of this smoke was just one man dressed in something that Harry first mistook as a pile of dirty rags. Harry's eyes briefly rested upon a well-endowed witch dressed in a four-size-too-small robes and very little else as she wandered around the bar, handing out new rounds of drinks with a flirtatious smile and a large wink. He wondered if any of her riveted customers could see past the number of glamour charms that littered her true appearance- a pox-faced, hunch-backed witch.

"What a dump," Tonks muttered as she nursed her own drink, her eyes flickering around the bar.

Harry would have reprimanded her for such stupid and noticeable behaviour until he saw that she wasn't the only one doing it-

everybody was. Even that heaving, fat wizard in the corner who was laughing too hard and spilling drink all over his robes let his squinty eyes travel around the room, as if he trusted nobody.

"Yeah," Harry agreed, nodding despite that fact that Tonks wouldn't be able to see it past the grouchy illusion. "It's cool, isn't it?"

"You are such a teenager, you know," Tonks said softly. Nonetheless, her bland features remained emotionless as she took a gulp of her drink. Harry suspected that her control over her face-changing abilities had given her some kind of control on how to suppress her facial emotions.

"C'mon," Harry sighed, even as his illusionary head ducked in closer to Tonks. Tonks followed Harry's lead and to the outsiders, it looked like they were conspiring together. "This is an authentic seedy bar. You don't see them around a lot."

"If I had my way, I'd burn the place down," Tonks muttered. Her lips were barely moving as she set her glass down. "Along with everybody inside it. Good riddance, I'd say."

"Random acts of violence," Harry said thoughtfully. "I like the idea already."

"This place is a den of criminals, a real hotspot for dark wizards," Tonks said, eyes flickering to a lean, one-eyed wizard who was laughing boisterously at the tale of his smirking friend. "The Department knows it. The owners of the pub knows that we know it. But we make-believe we don't know and the owners make-believe that they believe that we don't know. But we all know. Everybody knows."

"You're not drunk, are you?" Harry asked, raising an eyebrow and glancing down at Tonk's glass. It was almost three-quarters empty.

"That's what this is for," Tonks said, brushing something on her robes near her neck. "Transfigures the alcohol into normal water. Not good to get drunk on a mission."

Harry saw a weird little metal disc that sat under the collar of the shirt underneath her large, baggy brown robes. With his attention drawn to it, he could feel the tingle of magic running through it when she took another gulp, slamming her mug down on the table harder than it was necessary.

"If you guys all know about this place, why let it keep running?" Harry asked her as he motioned for the waitress to bring over another jug.

Tonks remained silent until another jug of alcohol was placed on their table and picked it up with feigned shaky hands. Harry saw a few white pills drop out of the sleeves of her robes and into the jug and nodded in approval, his respect for the Auror going up another notch. Tonks poured herself another glass and took a swill of it.

"Because it's useful," she said blandly. "The Aurors get a place to listen in on whenever they need to. The owners get protection from some of their legal obligations. The dark wizards get a central place where they know they can be relatively safe from the random spot-checks that happen everywhere else."

"And they don't know that they're being watched?" Harry asked. "They look like they do."

"Oh, they do," Tonks said. Her face was emotionless but Harry got the feeling as he stared into her eyes that she was grinning on the inside. "But because of the lack of official security, a lot of stuff can go through here undetected. For them, it's sometimes worth the risk. Besides, only the best Auror undercover agents can remain undetected in here. I'm pretty sure they're all suspecting both of us at the moment."

"Really?" Harry murmured. He had noticed the occasional glance and two that had been levelled at them but there was nothing approaching an intense scrutiny that meant they were being carefully watched.

"You may be good with your wand, great with it even," Tonks started chidingly.

“What wand are we talking about here?” Harry interrupted. His illusionary body grinned at her mischievously and Tonks narrowed her eyes.

“Like I was saying,” Tonks continued. “Skill with a wand means jack-all in this type of setting. You may think that we’re not being watched but we are. I’ve seen all five of them, and they’re ready to kill us if we prove to be Aurors. They might even do it as well, since we don’t have any backup waiting for us.”

“Well, that’s easy to solve,” Harry said cheerfully. “We’ll just have to show that we’re not Aurors. ”

“How do we do that?” Tonks questioned carefully.

“Easy,” Harry said, a sly smirk crossing his face. “I get up and act like myself.”

Harry ignored Tonks startled face as he stepped away from his table and approached the bar. At the same time, a large burly wizard with arms as thick as tree-trunks stepped away from the bar, a mug of firewhiskey in his hand. Harry wondered if his mother had been frisky with a Troll or something, but decided that he would be a perfect target. In a scene so well choreographed that it looked like it had been rehearsed, Harry staggered back as if the other wizard had just pushed at him with his shoulder. At the same time, his leg came up and smacked into the burly wizard’s shin. The other wizard lost his balance as his mug went flying, landing straight on Harry’s illusionary chest.

Had Harry been a normal wizard, even an Auror, then the illusion would have been disrupted to a certain point. However, with Meciél guiding the flows of magic that kept the image in place, she was easily able to keep up with the new changes without any delay. To that end saw Harry, soaked in Firewhiskey, glaring intently at the other wizard, who was glaring right back.

“What was that?” Harry bellowed, gesturing at his shirt.

“You fucking...” the man started, glaring at his empty mug in fury.

It was all Harry needed.

The man was cut off as Harry swung at him wildly, wearing a bloodthirsty grin as he smashed his empty mug on the other man's face. The larger man gave a gurgling cry of pain as the glass shattered on his cheek, tearing into skin. Blood dribbled from the lacerations as Harry kept up the surprise assault, shoving the man to the ground with a violent push and shoving his wand in his face.

"Do I need to use this?" Harry whispered. His illusionary form was the perfect picture of a wizard standing in the abyss of madness, complete with the curled up lip, the bared teeth and the crazed, wild look in his frantic eyes.

The man was shaking with anger but reluctantly shook his head. Harry smirked and lowered his wand. Bending down, he plucked a large glass splinter out of the man's cheek, ignoring the snarls of pain, and gazed at it. Inwardly grimacing, Harry rang the tip of his tongue over the blood-covered shard and smiled as the tangy taste struck his tongue.

"Cowardice, fear, dread, terror," Harry whispered to the silent bar. "You're not worth my time. Touch me again, though, and I'll kill you. Alright?"

The man nodded slowly, muttering 'psychopath!' under his breath. Harry stood back, whipping his wand and repairing his mug with a single incantation. Ignoring everybody else, including a stony-looking Tonks, he strode to the bar, received his refill and move to sit back down.

"That was stupid!" Tonks hissed as Harry sidled down beside her, shooting the bloodied man intense looks of fury and maniac rage that only made him appear more of a psychopath.

"It worked," Harry said blandly, even as he kept up his disgruntled glare at the larger man. "I'm a psychopath now. Besides, I drew attention to myself. Not exactly Auror behaviour, is it?"

“You need to...” Tonks started to reprimand softly, before she went silent and started to gaze into her glass. Cocking her slightly to the right, she spoke softly to Harry. “That’s him. That’s who we need to get.”

Harry kept his illusion hunched over his drink, moving his lips as if he were muttering something, while he turned his head and gazed at the alleged supporter of Voldemort. He wasn’t an impressive man, a lanky, unshaven wizard with long, stringy dark-hair and a set of greedy eyes. To Harry’s amusement, he strode over the table where the larger man Harry had smashed up was sitting.

“That’s his contact?” Tonks breathed in horror. “Potter, you’re an idiot.”

Harry huffed, while Tonks scratched her head. His sharp eyes picked up the quick subtle movements of her fingers as she placed something behind her ear. He frowned, but shrugged and took another gulp of his firewhiskey, feeling the generous burning sensations warm up the pit of his stomach. He knew he didn’t have to worry too much about getting drunk, after all, having a Fallen that could manipulate the very neurons in your brains provided some benefits.

Unless she was being a bitch. Then you woke up on a beach in Hawaii in the middle of the night with a spread of cocktail glasses around you and a hangover that rivalled the Cruciatus Curse.

“So now what?” Harry asked a few moments later.

“I can’t hear them,” Tonks said, frustration colouring her voice. “It’s all...static...like I have bad reception or something.”

“Can we snatch him now?” Harry asked, rolling his eyes.

He’d be the first to admit that he was starting to get bored. Sure, he didn’t mind spending his time sitting on his arse but he preferred to do it somewhere where he didn’t have to worry about some random nobody putting a knife in his back or something.

“We’ll wait for him to leave,” Tonks muttered. “Then we’ll follow him out, nice and quiet.”

A few moments rolled into ten minutes, all the while Harry was getting more and more irritated, to the point where the scowl plastered on his illusion’s face was genuine. Just as he was about to snap at Tonks, their target shook the hands with the large, burly man in a business-like manner.

“Looks like they’re done,” Tonks muttered.

Harry said nothing, watching carefully as the larger man pulled out his wand and tapped his glass, narrowing his beady eyes in concentration. A flash of blue light seeped from the tip and both Harry and Tonks realised what was happening in an instant.

“A portkey!” the female Auror hissed.

“Follow my lead,” Harry barked, jumping up from the seat. His mind whirled with a dozen possibilities, finally settling on one as his feet struck the ground and his wand reached his hand. He levelled it at the surprised pair of criminals and allowed his illusion to sneer menacingly. “Crucio!”

A crack filled the air as a blast of dark crimson light flashed once, slamming into the man and propelling him from his seat. Shrieks and startled yells filled the air as the burly man, his eyes widening, grasped the completely portkey and disappeared. Harry stalked forward, his wand darting forward and slicing into one of the wizards who tried to stop him. The bar was in madness, several of the patrons promptly disappearing on the spot or fleeing for the doors. A few tried to stop him, but most saw no need as Harry strolled over to the fallen man and grinned down at him.

“Who are...” the man started, before a scarlet flash of light blasted his consciousness into oblivion.

Harry hauled him up and grabbed a startled Tonk’s arm as she ran towards them. From what he knew about the Ministry detection

systems, he knew he only had a few more seconds, so he faced the rest of the bar with a terrible glare on his illusionary face.

“Remember this!” Harry yelled out in a voice different from his own. “This is what happens to those who dare oppose the Dark Lord! Remember!”

And with that overly-dramatic statement, Harry, his arms around Tonks and the prisoner, turned on his heels and disappeared with a sharp crack, just as the first of the Aurors burst through the door in a whirl of crimson cloaks.

“What the hell were you doing?” Was the first thing Tonks bellowed as they appeared in the kitchen of No. 12 Grimmauld Place. She snatched her arm away from Harry, glaring at him angrily.

Harry ignored the overly loud Auror as he dropped the unconscious man, who landed on the ground with a loud thud, and walked over to the kitchen sink. Tonks watched, her disguise gone as she morphed back into her original- or so Harry thought- self. There was no hiding the incredible amount of anger that the other Auror was feeling.

“Your breasts look sexy as hell when you breathe as hard as that,” Harry complimented, flashing a grin at her. He turned back to the drawers, opening them and pulling out the occasional utensil. “I should piss you off more often.”

“You used an Unforgivable Curse,” Tonks said, breathing deeply. “You used one of the most illegal curse in the history of the Ministry of Magic in front of an Auror, a witch who is legally obliged to stop you.”

“I did, didn’t I?” Harry asked absently, gazing at a large prong-ended instrument. An unbidden thought came to mind and Harry grimaced, dropping the kitchen utensil back in the draw. “For my sake, I’m not going to use that.”

“What are you doing?” Tonks asked. Her nostrils were flaring with the effort of suppressing her anger but she was clearly curious as to what he was up to. “Why do you need all of those?”

“Interrogation,” Harry answered her blankly.

He flicked his wand and the man’s unconscious body floated behind him as he stomped up the stairs. He ducked his head into one of the many doors and surveyed it, making sure that it seemed disused and abandoned. It wouldn’t do for somebody to try to break in when he was working. Footsteps pounded after him and Tonks burst into the room, her bubblegum-pink hair framing her wild eyes.

“Interrogation?” she practically shrieked.

“Well, I probably won’t use most of them,” Harry admitted. “But it’s all about appearance. He’s gotta believe that I will. Trust me, I’ve done this before.”

“You...what...is...” Tonks was stuttering her words now, looking horrified.

“Why do you think I’m here, Nymphomaniac Tonks?” Harry asked her. A cold smile curved his lips when she stayed silent, staring at him if she had never seen him before. “Dumbledore picked me for this because he didn’t want to dirty your hands.”

“Don’t call me...” Tonks started. She paused and glowered at him furiously. “Ha fucking ha. Like I haven’t heard that one before, Potter! Besides, Dumbledore would never...”

“Dumbledore already has,” Harry interrupted grimly. Tonks’ mouth closed with a snap as he continued. “Don’t mistake the man for the paragon of virtue. He’s determined to win this war, which means unleashing his most powerful weapon. Me.”

“You’ll really do it, won’t you?” Tonks whispered softly.

“Well, I suppose I could use Truth Potions, but I don’t have any on me at the moment and they’re not fool-proof,” Harry said blandly. “So we’ll do this the old fashioned way- physical torture.”

“You...I...Dumbledore? Really?” Tonks stuttered out. It was a fair cry from her normal confident self and Harry wasn’t impressed.

"Stop blubbering, you little twit," he snapped coldly, making Tonks start. "This is the beginning of a war. He," he said, gesturing at the unconscious man floating beside him, "is the enemy. He has information I need and I will get it from him."

"How?" Tonks asked, her voice barely a whisper.

"By using this," Harry deadpanned, holding up a silver tablespoon.

Tonks stared at the gleaming spoon.

"People under physical duress will say anything to avoid it," she quoted from somewhere.

"Nah, that won't work," Harry said, grinning. He took Tonks by the hand, one of his fingers extending up to the wrist and the rest pressing her fingers together firmly. "Tell a lie."

"What?"

"Tell me a lie," Harry urged her. "Go on."

"You're a decent human being," Tonks said, pinning Harry with a pointed look.

"Your blood pressure went up," Harry said instantly. He frowned. "There's increased activity in the glands that produce sweat as well. There's increased electrical activity in your nervous system, a common sign of stress. Hell, I can even tell that certain part of your brains activated for a split second just as you were creating that...lie." He dropped her hand, smiling coldly. "He won't be able to get a lie past me. All I need to do is to motivate him to tell the truth."

Harry turned back to the man and paused, while Tonks stood rigid behind him.

"If you want to stay, stay. But this will probably become messy and there'll be a lot of screaming and blood and all that crap. If you can't take that, then you should probably go."

Tonks looked conflicted, her conscience warring with the harsh reality of the situation. Harry, with his back turned to her, didn't see what she did but a moment later the door closed quietly behind him. Harry stared back at the door thoughtfully, his green eyes narrowed in thought. Then, with a sigh, he waved his wand and revived the man from his spell-induced coma.

"Aurors these days are a bunch of wimps," he grumbled to himself as the man's eyes shot open.

"Who are you?" was the first thing out of his mouth. His panicked voice filled the room as he twisted and flailed under the invisible bonds surrounding him. "Where am I? What's going on? Why am I here?"

"Well, my name is..." Harry paused and dropped the illusion charm surrounding him, allowing his true face to show itself. "My name is Harry Potter. You're in the headquarters to the Order of Phoenix. You were kidnapped because Dumbledore thinks that you have information about Death Eaters... something about an enclave or something."

"I'm innocent!" the man screamed and Harry winced. He flicked his wand and a flash of blue shot around the room, seeping into the walls and producing a sound-proof barrier between that room and the rest of the house.

"Well, that sucks," Harry said blandly. "I guess I'll have to kill you now."

"What?!" the man practically squealed, stark terror on his face.

"If you're innocent, then you know nothing," Harry explained, rolling his eyes and sounding like he was explaining something to a particularly stupid child. "And if you know nothing, you're not useful. If you're not useful, then you don't need to live."

"You can't," the man whimpered.

"I can," Harry said gleefully and dark fire flashed behind his emerald eyes. A slow, languid smile crossed his face as he bent down. "Here's the thing. You're a dead man now. You can die quickly and painlessly, or I can rip your fingers and toes off one by one until you tell me what I want to know. The only hope you have left is if you impress me with your lack of loyalty and tell me everything you know. After that, I might let the Aurors deal with you. That's fair, right?"

The man gulped and shivered, his face screwed up in terror. A moment later Harry was hit by a pungent smell of fresh urine and glanced down at the man's robes, seeing a newly-spreading wet patch. He grimaced and backed away from him, looking disgusted.

"I guess we'll start with the wand-work for now," he muttered. He raised his wand. "Here's one of my favourites. Crucio!"

A/N: Ahoy, fellow readers. Here's chapter five for you. Thanks to the crowd at DLP- you know who you are, guys- for their help. Then again, I must mention them in every single Author Note so everybody else probably knows who they are as well. That said, for those who don't know, DLP is short for DarkLordPotter. It's a group of forums that I frequent quite a lot. Google it if you're interested. A reminder that this chapter also goes up at PatronusCharm.net.

A thanks goes to RadioactiveBloke from DLP, who made several corrections of the last chapter. I've reloaded it, so they should all be fixed now. Content-wise, nothings changed.

It was in the early hours of the morning when Harry finally exited the small bedroom, the sun peaking up from the horizon through the blood-splattered window.

There were a few members of the Order of Phoenix down in the dreary kitchen who had arrived for an early breakfast. Sirius was one, the shaggy-haired man looking bored and disgruntled as he chewed on his food. Sitting next to him was Arthur Weasley, the mild-mannered man smiling gratefully at his plump wife as she bustled around the kitchen, using her wand to direct the frying pan at one moment and squeezing fresh orange juice with a handy charm the next. At the other end of the table sat a tall, dark-skinned man with a solemn expression. He was clad in the robes of an Auror but didn't seem too concerned that a wanted convict was sitting two seats down from him. Sitting next to him was Nymphadora Tonks. Unlike the rest of her fellow Order members, Tonks wore a downcast expression and fiddled around with the food on her plate with a fork. Her brows were furrowed and she seemed to be contemplating something very deeply, her vacant eyes staring at nothing in particular.

This was the scene that greeted Harry as he strode in. Eyes swung to meet him as Harry gave them a half-hearted wave. Sometime during the night, Harry had removed his charmed black-jacket, and it hung over his shoulder casually. His hair was ruffled, his eyes bloodshot and his grin a tad on the obnoxious side. All in all, it almost made him look like the picture-perfect rebellious teenager.

Almost. The blood dripping from his hands probably wasn't part of the standard teenager act.

"Morning, weaklings," Harry greeted cheerfully, if tiredly.

He ignored the stares he was receiving as he wandered over to the kitchen sink, walking past a paling and flabbergasted Molly Weasley. As he washed his hands under the tap, thick crimson rivets swirling in the basin, Molly exchanged glances with Arthur and approached him.

"Are you alright, Harry?" she asked cautiously.

Before he could say anything, Tonks snorted. When the plump red-haired woman turned to her in confusion, the shape-shifting witch merely smiled bitterly. Harry turned, noting that Tonks's hair had turned a rather dull shade of brown.

"Don't worry, Molly," Tonks said with a brittle smile. "It's not his blood."

"What do you mean?" Molly asked confusedly.

The rest of the table seemed to get it though. The dark-skinned Auror stared at Harry with mild alarm, his muscles tensing beneath his robes. Sirius started in surprise, literally jerking his spoon over his boiled egg and smashing the egg to pieces. Arthur merely stared up at Harry with sadness, a mildly reproaching and sympathetic expression on his face.

"So," Harry stared cheerfully. "Is Dumbledore in? I got some information that he might want."

"He's in the other room," the dark-skinned man rumbled in his deep baritone. He started to stand, as if to lead Harry to the aged Headmaster, but Tonks placed a hand on his shoulder.

"No, Kingsley, I'll do it," she interrupted. She gazed at Harry, her expression indeterminable behind those dark orbs. "I want to see what I was a part of last night."

"Please, you give yourself too much credit, Nymphomaniac Tonks," Harry responded with a shrug. He smiled cockily at Tonk's stormy expression, grinning when Sirius choked on his porridge and gazed up at him.

"Nymphomaniac...now that's a hoot!" the ex-convict snorted, not looking at all perturbed by Tonk's glare. He suddenly yelped, clutching his leg under the table and glaring at the female Auror angrily.

"C'mon, Harry," Tonks said, rising from her seat and giving Sirius a disdainful stare. "I'll take you to the Headmaster."

With one last derisive sneer to the rest of the Order of Phoenix (after all, he did have to keep up appearances) Harry followed Tonks out of the kitchen. The older woman was silent, her posture tense, which indicated that she might be stressed. Harry decided to share his opinion with the Auror by telling her exactly that.

"You seem stressed," Harry noted.

"I'm surprised you noticed," Tonks responded snippily, glancing back at Harry.

"I was checking out your arse and noticed all your muscles are taut," Harry admitted honestly. "Nice arse, by the way. Can you do that shape-changing thing with your whole body? I thought it just might have been your face?"

"I'm a metamorphmagus," Tonks replied stiffly. "We can change our physical appearance at will, without using potions or charms. It makes us great undercover agents, since there's no way to detect us."

"That is so cool," Harry exclaimed. He paused in his step, halfway down one of the damp hallways of Grimmauld Place, and his eyes widened. "Oh! I just had a great idea!"

"I'm not sleeping with you," Tonks deadpanned. "And I've heard them all before."

“Ah, shit,” Harry grumbled.

The two climbed the stairs in silence, Harry marvelling at the opportunities the woman in front of him presented. Normally, he wasn't the type to lust after a woman (considering he had nothing short of the ultimate wet dream living in his head) but Tonk's abilities were just that awesome- to him, anyway. Or maybe it was hormones? He was a growing boy, after all.

“I wonder if my dick's gotten bigger.” Harry mused to himself softly.

“What?” Tonks asked, looking at Harry strangely.

“I said I wonder what Dumbledore's doing, the...nigger?” Harry fumbled quickly. He paused and shook his head. “Ooh, that's low-even for me. Do I really want to be part of the minority-based hate groups that exclude people merely on the basis of skin colour? Do I really want to talk about this kind of bullshit every day? What to do...what to do...”

There was an awkward pause as Tonks stared at Harry carefully. Finally, she shook her head in disgust and continued the walk to the little room Dumbledore had cornered off as his study.

“I wouldn't say that in front of Kingsley,” she remarked casually.

“Let him try,” Harry snorted. “I'll beat his black arse from here back to Africa.”

“I didn't know you were such a racist,” Tonks said sweetly, but Harry could detect the dangerous undertone in her voice.

“Racism this week, sexism next week, specism the week after- I have a tight schedule,” Harry explained. He scratched his head and grinned. “It's hard work to insult every single possible minority group, but somebody has to do it.”

Tonks made something that might have been a snort of amusement.

“And to answer your question, I think Dumbledore’s writing some letters to the Ministry,” she added.

“Probably writing it in Aramaic,” Harry muttered.

“What are you talking about?” Tonks asked, rolling her eyes as she came to a stop in front of a simple wooden door.

Harry could feel the power of the wards on it and knew that it must be Dumbledore’s work- out of this phoenix club only he had the power to generate those kinds of spells.

“Aramaic. It’s an ancient language,” Harry said. “You know, because Dumbledore’s so old? “I bet he’ll have it delivered by a Roman Centurion.”

Tonks merely stared at him.

“Dumbledore’s first car...was a chariot,” Harry continued, a grin playing at his lips. “Dumbledore called his first wife hon’...because she was one! Dumbledore’s first Christmas...was the first Christmas.”

Tonk’s lips were twitching in something that might have been a weak smile, but overall she remained impassive.

“Dumbledore’s hobbies include eating, sleeping and evolution. Dumbledore likes to take long walks on the beach...after crawling out of the ocean and growing legs. Dumbledore’s birthstone is...lava,” Harry shot at her, one line after the other. “Finally, the big bang...” He paused and frowned. “Well, I don’t have anything for that yet but I know it’s there!”

“You are horrible,” Tonks concluded, but managed a weak smile while doing so.

“Horrible, yet handsome and amusing,” Harry added. His face took on a thoughtful look and he appraised Tonk’s carefully. “Hey, do you know what would really look good on you?”

“A bikini?” Tonks guessed sarcastically.

“No, me,” Harry retorted. “We should go out sometime.”

“If you two are quite done” an amused and wizened voice interrupted before Tonks could reply to that horribly-worded pick-up line.

Tonks jumped and Harry blinked. They turned to the study door to see it open, with Albus Dumbledore standing at the doorway. His light-blue eyes were twinkling merrily and he stood aside, wordlessly gesturing for Tonks and Harry to enter.

“Dumbledore,” Harry greeted lazily as he entered the study.

The room seemed a lot bigger on the inside than it did on the outside. A large bookshelf dwarfed over them, full of thick tomes that, judging by the layer of dust over them, hadn’t been disturbed in quite some time. A writing desk lay in the corner, a half-written piece of parchment lying on top of several finished scrolls. Harry leant against the wall as Dumbledore closed the door, unconcerned with decorum, while Tonks stiffened and stood at attention, as soldier would in front of a superior officer.

“Good morning, Harry and Nymphadora,” Dumbledore greeted, strolling through the room and pressing his half-moon glasses up on his overly-crooked nose.

“Ha! He said my name first!” Harry muttered, nudging Tonks in the ribs.

“Oh, grow up,” the Auror hissed at him, remaining rigid.

“Not if I can help it,” Harry said with a snort.

He reached into his coat and pulled out a small notebook. With a casual throw, he tossed it over to Dumbledore. The elderly wizard moved a lot faster than somebody his age had the right to, snatching the book out of the air and examining closely.

“My notes from last night,” Harry clarified. He looked very pleased with himself. “Me and Joseph had a good old talk about things over a

nice cup of boiling lead. After some good old fashioned male bonding, he was quite happy to tell me everything I wanted. Then I tortured him some more for lying to me. It was fun.”

Dumbledore stood still. A shuddered breath escaped his lips and his eyes half-closed in sudden sadness, the twinkle reduced to a dull stare. For a moment, he looked truly old and broken. Tonks shifted forward, her face full of concern despite whatever feelings she had on the matter, but Dumbledore waved her away and slowly sat back down in his chair. Harry could have sworn he heard the bones creaking all the way over the other side of the room.

“I see,” Dumbledore said, fingering the notepad absently.

All good humour from the room had vanished- well, on the part of the Headmaster and Tonks at least. Harry was still grinning happily and feeling inordinately pleased. That said, Harry was also wearing a blood-soaked shirt, which Dumbledore was eying in horrified askance.

“Is it true?” Tonks demanded. “Did you order Harry to...to torture that man?”

“Yes,” Dumbledore admitted solemnly.

Tonk’s sudden intake of breath was drowned out by Harry’s loud derisive chuckle.

“Please,” the Denarian said lazily. “I only take orders from one person- and even then it’s a touch and go thing- and let me tell you, you’re not her. For one, you don’t have breasts, and those are necessary to get me to do half the stuff I’m meant to.”

“Why?” Tonks asked in a near-whisper and the mere sound of her broken voice was enough to make Dumbledore unconsciously flinch. “Why did you make Harry torture him?”

“Because it had to be done,” Dumbledore replied softly. He pressed his fingers together and heaved a great sigh, looking old and tired. “We needed the information. I will not allow hesitation to weaken our

resolve. I did so in Lord Voldemort's first uprising and was it not for a twist of fate, he would have won."

"But..." Tonks protested.

"Oi, shut up," Harry broke in before she could finish. He was feeling quite annoyed all of a sudden. He glared at the wide-eyed Auror and sneered at her. "The old man's finally grown some balls and is taken this little war seriously and you wanna come in and wreck it for him? C'mon, he's a wimp. If you change his mind now, he'll never go back."

"How could you do it?" Tonks snapped at him. Her eyes were suspiciously bright and it looked like a part of her 'perfect world' had just come down crashing around her. "How could you torture somebody like that?"

"Oh, that's easy," Harry shrugged. He stared Tonks straight in the eye and smiled. "I'm a monster, Tonks."

Dumbledore sat there silently as Tonks gaped at him, at the words that he had just so casually thrown into her face.

"What?' she uttered in confusion.

"I'm a monster,' Harry repeated. "I'm selfish, lazy and self-absorbed. I care for nobody apart from myself. I'm a mean vicious bastard as well who has absolutely no sense of empathy towards his fellow man. I tortured that man because he had something I wanted, and what I want I take. He was nobody, a nothing. I will torture a thousand more like him in my lifetime and I'll never lose any sleep over it."

"So this is the price of a better world, a world of peace and freedom," Tonks said bitterly.

"Oh, you stupid girl," Harry said, but there was something like fondness in his voice. "I don't belong in that world you dream of. I don't fight for peace and freedom. I fight because Voldemort cut me up, blew up my house and totally ruined my silk sheets."

“While I would disagree on the validity of several of Harry’s self-listed qualities, there are some points where he is correct in his assessment,” Dumbledore said quietly. He stood up and walked over to a still Tonks, placing his gnarled hands on her shoulders. She gazed up at him, like a child would to a beloved grandfather. “I was there at your birth. I was there at your Christening. I was there for your fifth birthday, where you chased after a garden gnome with a broomstick while wearing nothing at all. I was there when you were sorted. I saw your first kiss, although I daresay that you remember that embarrassing incident quite better than I do. I was there when you graduated as a fine, young witch and when you joined the Auror Corp to protect the magical world that you so loved.’

Tonks was silent.

“You asked why requested that Harry do whatever it took to get the information we needed, up to and including physical coercion,” Dumbledore continued. He stroked the Auror’s head fondly. “Tell me, Nymphadora. How could I ask this of you? Of the three of us, you are the most innocent. I would like it to remain that way, and it that means that a self-proclaimed monster must bloody his hands, then so be it.”

Harry couldn’t see Tonks’ face but he heard a snuffle and rolled his eyes. That was it. He had had enough of this emotional revelations crap. With a not-so-subtle clearing of his throat, Harry met Dumbledore’s wise blue eyes.

“So, I’ve got things I need to do,” he said. He yawned and scratched his head. “I’m outta here. Call me when you need me to ‘bloody my hands’.”

“Do not forget that we have a scheduled meeting at Hogwarts tomorrow,” Dumbledore said quietly. “I will see you at half-past noon, if you do not mind.”

“What? Oh, right, that,” Harry said with sudden clarification. He frowned. “Wait, what day is this? I came back on the Friday night, Saturday with the apartment, Saturday night with the mission, Sunday morning with the torture, Sunday now with you...yeah, that makes sense, I guess.”

"I have a great many things to teach you, Harry, and limited timeframe," Dumbledore said gravely. "Don't be late."

"Yeah, yeah," Harry dismissed with a bored yawn. He strolled from the room, departing with a lazy wave of his hand. "Later, you wrinkled grapefruit of a wizard. Later, Nymphomaniac Tonks. Say, do you know what would make you feel better?"

"What?" Tonks asked quietly, turning her head and staring at Harry dully.

"Hot, passionate, sweaty sex," Harry said and grinned. "We should go out sometime, no?"

Tonks picked up a book and hurled it at him. Harry ducked behind the door and the book slammed into wood, bouncing off onto the ground. The loud thud coincided with Harry's loud, obnoxious laughter and Tonks gritted her teeth.

"He's right about something," she muttered. "He is a mean little bastard."

"Well, that went well," Harry remarked to nobody in particular as he climbed the stairs to his cheap and damp apartment.

An old woman, decked in her shopping clothes complete with bags, stared at him strangely and moved to the other side of the stairwell as Harry strolled past her. Harry was tempted to give her a little push but restrained himself. It wouldn't do to bring unwanted attention to his new place of residence. Besides, picking on the elderly was like poking a two-legged dog with a stick - something that Harry knew was extremely amusing from past experience.

A pair of arms draped themselves around his neck as he climbed past the third floor, long strands of hair brushing over his face as their owner's voice whispered into Harry's ear.

"Your aims were achieved," Meciell said silkily. "You affirmed that you will stand against Lord Voldemort, consolidated your position in the

Order of Phoenix and sexually harassed a poor, unsuspecting Auror. All in all, I would say that it was a productive night.”

“My, my, you’re not jealous, are you?” Harry asked with the formation of a lecherous grin.

The rational part of his mind told him that it wasn’t possible for a woman to hold onto his shoulders as he was climbing a set of stairs like this, but Harry promptly told it to shut up. Meciél’s manipulation of his perception very rarely concerned itself with the logical, much to Harry’s delight and disappointment. Wouldn’t it be logical for a seductive fallen angel to do the deed, so to speak, and secure Harry’s mostly blind allegiance? If Harry didn’t love the Fallen so much, he might have pointed this out to her. Ah, hell, she could probably take a joke...

“No, my little beloved human,” Meciél broke into his thoughts, her melodious voice washing over his mind.

“Reading my thoughts is cheating, Meciél,” Harry grumbled, but couldn’t stop the smile that tugged at his lips as Meciél laughed delicately in his ear.

He reached his apartment door, glanced around and then tapped his wand on the handle. Hellfire flashed from the faded runes that had been carved into the stick of holly, a red crimson light illuminating the damp, darkened hallway around him. Layers of defensive wards (the nasty kind that caused intruding wizards and witches to grow a second head, which would promptly start eating the first) fell away and the lock clicked once.

Harry moved to open the door but paused, his hand hovering over the doorknob. His entire body was rigid as the supernatural senses granted to him by Meciél started blaring in alarm. Somebody had been here not too long, somebody with some faint vestiges of power around them. Harry narrowed his eyes in thought as he tried to identify what he was sensing. He suddenly sighed as it hit him and rolled his eyes.

“Stupid bastards,” he muttered as he opened the door. “I hope they got zapped.”

Harry stepped inside his apartment and threw his jacket across the room, which landed on the small, grimy table in the corner of the room. Something crunched under his foot and Harry stared down, seeing a plain manila folder.

“I guess that’s what those sanctimonious pricks wanted,” Harry said, bending down to pick up the folder. “Maybe they agree with me after all. Give me what I need and I’ll kill the Fallen bastards for them. No offence, Meciél.”

‘None taken.’

He idly flipped through it as he made his way to the kitchen. He may have been able to pick up a few sentences here and then with a cursory glance, but Meciél had memorised the entire document in an instant. Something radiated from her, a blast of anticipation and vengeful longing that made Harry stumble in his step. He grimaced and rubbed his head, ignoring the addictive and pleasurable side-effects of the Hellfire that flooded through his veins with well-practised ease.

“Good news or bad news?” Harry asked wryly as he reached into the cupboard for some of the groceries he bought yesterday.

“It all depends, really,” Meciél answered quietly. She appeared in the room, sitting down on one of the battered wooden chairs by the kitchen table as if it were a throne. She stared down at Harry imperiously, darkness flickering in her silvery orbs. “The Knights of the Cross have given us some useful, albeit minor, headway into my quest for vengeance- the location of a company owned by one of the three I must destroy.”

“Our quest,” Harry corrected as he made himself some canned-fruit salad. “I’m the one who’s slugging the spells around. Remember that.”

“Our quest,” Meciél corrected with a polite bow of her head. She was silent as Harry picked up his bowl, walked over to the table and promptly sat in her lap.

For a moment, the Denarian Knight felt his arse hit solid wood as Meciél’s surprise at his sudden actions delayed her speeds. But less than a second later, Meciél had manipulated the appropriate parts of his perception and suddenly Harry was sitting in her lap, casually eating his breakfast.

“You’re very clingy, and annoying, much like a stray cat really,” Meciél remarked. Harry felt her hands rustle in his hair. “A very dirty stray cat. I thought I had taught my host better than this. If we are going to torture and battle our foes, we must look exceptionally beautiful while doing so.”

Harry could feel her chest on his back and grinned, knowing Meciél could see it.

“And you call me a narcissist,” he snickered.

“No I don’t,” Meciél disagreed and Harry paused.

“Ah, well, you know what I mean,” Harry said with a light shrug. “Besides, I’m content in the knowledge that your breasts are pressed against my back and my arse is rubbing your crotch.”

“Such a crude boy,” Meciél said lazily, affectionately tussling at his hair. “As I was saying, it is details of a small business owned by a company that is owned by the Denarian Polonius Lartessa. She uses it to deliver weaponry to various dictators and war-mongers around the world. Of the many civil wars, riots and totalitarian regimes from the past one-thousand years, you can be sure that Lartessa had a hand in half of them in one way or another.”

“Chaos, blood, destruction, human misery, yadda yadda yadda. Sounds like the Blackened Order of Denarius,” Harry commented, his mouth half-full of fruit. He swallowed and frowned. “I really need to buy some better food. We used to have great dinners together, remember that Meciél?”

“Oh, quite,” Meciél said lightly. But her tone darkened as she continued. “Lartessa- although she goes by ‘Tessa’ these days- was the wife of an old friend of yours, and the mother of another old friend.”

“Nicodemus and Deirdre,” Harry supplied. “I’m not totally brain-dead, you know. I do remember a lot of the stuff you tell me. Well, some of it. The stuff that concerns your enemies, at least. Tessa is the next in line to become the leader of the Blackened Order. She’s a powerful sorceress, capable of many powerful evocation spells, blah blah blah. Hmm, evocation- I haven’t really thought about True Magic for a while.”

“Do not take her lightly,” Meciél warned and the tugging on his hair became slightly painful, making Harry grimace. “She is just as powerful as Vesper, more so, even. The only reason she did not rule after the death of Nicodemus was because she lacked the patience to deal with the more subtle inclinations the Order needed and because she lacked the status that Vesper held.”

“Being one of those what-do-you-call-it, a Denarian Lord?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Meciél answered. Suddenly she was sitting on the other side of the table before him, although Harry’s seat on her lap didn’t feel any different, nor did her habitual toying with his hair. It must be good having the multitasking capabilities of, well, a lesser god.

“I am the last true Denarian Lord,” Meciél told him and her silver eyes burned with a corona of flaring light, bright enough to make Harry wince and shield his eyes.

If there was one thing Meciél loved, and Harry too, it was theatrics.

“Anduriel and his host, Nicodemus, have fallen before my might...”

“My might, you mean...” Harry mumbled, but he was ignored.

“As has that traitorous infidel, Vesper,” Meciél continued, ignoring Harry. “I am the last of the Lords now, for the moment, at least. I shall reap my vengeance across the Blackened Order of Denarius for the sins they committed against me. Their slights will be repaid ten-fold, their bodies bathed in the power of my Hellfire- more potent than all of the combined!”

“While we’re out doing that, can we stop off at a supermarket?” Harry asked, frowning down at his food. “I’m still hungry and this seriously sucks.”

Meciél sighed and stared at Harry reproachfully, the light in her eyes dimming into her normal silver.

“Work with me here, my beloved,” she said exasperatedly.

“Sure, sure,” Harry nodded. “Revenge and killing and traitors and burning- it all sounds good.”

“We shall start tonight, at Matheson and co. Shipping,” Meciél declared. “We shall root out our enemies and burn them.”

“Cool,” Harry supplied helpfully. “Well, not really. I suppose it’ll be hot, with the burning and that.”

“Just get some rest,” Meciél sighed. “You may need it for tonight.”

“Okay,” Harry agreed, dropping down his spoon and yawning. He moved towards the bedroom, with the mattress that smelled like old beer (despite Harry’s best charm work) and paused. “Ya’ going to join me?”

“No.”

“Ouch.”

“I have to say, I’m disappointed,” Harry remarked sourly later that night. “I was expecting a well-guarded fortress with demons and vampires and dark wizards and legions upon legions of nameless

minions for me to slaughter. But all I've got is a couple of security guards too hyped up on caffeine to pay attention."

He was standing outside a small building, wearing an expression of annoyance and generally glaring at nothing in particular. With a flick of his wand, the door to the office clicked open and Harry walked inside.

"You'll have to forgive me," Meciél said dryly, her pristine form appearing next to Harry. "Next time, I'll be sure to send you to battle on the fourteenth level of Hell. The residents there are particularly grouchy."

"Hell has a fourteenth level?" Harry asked with raised eyebrows. "Didn't Dante only journey to nine or something?"

Meciél smiled at him, looking more condescending than amused.

"What would mortals know about the mechanics of Hell?" Meciél laughed lightly. "Really, it was the Chinese and their concept of Diyu that is the closest to truly understanding Hell, and even then it is limited."

"Cheap plastic goods, crappy electronics and Hell," Harry muttered. "Another thing to thanks the Chinese for, I guess."

"I do admire your dedication and devotion in insulting every racial group in existence but perhaps we should focus on the task at hand," Meciél said, sounding amused. There was a glowing smile on her face as she gestured at the large stack of file cabinets around them.

Harry sighed and rubbed his forehead.

"That's just great," he muttered. "Then again, I am a wizard, aren't I?"

He pulled out his wand and gave it a short, sharp flick. A few brightly-glowing sparks shot from the tip, but they became lost in a literal whirlwind as every the drawers of every single cabinet shot open with a colossal bang. With another wave of his wand, the air was suddenly full of massive amounts of paperwork. It swirled around in a giant

twister of white, black and the occasional graph or two. Harry directed it with his wand, ignoring the loud crash when the desk was turned over or when the paperwork smashed one of the windows.

“Ready?” Harry called out and Meciél’s illusion nodded, fading away into nothing.

Carefully, Harry brought the twister of papers just in front of him and slowed it down. Focussing, he allowed Meciél’s presence to dominate his eyesight, blistering hellfire almost scorching the flesh. Harry knew that if he were to look into a mirror at the moment, his eyes would be wreathed in an unholy flame.

It made him look kinda cool.

Harry waved his wand and it began. The twister of paper veered to the other end of the room and a flurry of wind. Forming a queue of sorts, the paper column, directed by Harry’s wand, shot towards Harry, missing his head by mere centimetres and flashing past his eye. As this happened, Meciél took in every single word on the page, memorised the document and analysed the information. The paper continued to shoot by, thousands of sheets slamming into the wall and falling to the ground, discarded.

In a matter of seconds, Meciél had memorised and analysed hundreds of documents, linking all of the information together and determining what was relevant or not. Even before the last piece of scrunched up paper had floated to the ground as Harry lowered his wand, Meciél had already deciphered what she wanted to know. Judging by the irritation that was emanating from her, Harry deduced that whatever Meciél was looking for, it wasn’t there.

“Any luck?” Harry asked cheerfully, glancing at the massive amounts of paperwork on the floor and wondering if his Fallen companion would mind if he set it on fire.

“Some.” Meciél’s voice washed over his ear as she appeared before him, a faint look of annoyance on her beautiful features.

She absently flicked her long, dark hair over her shoulder and Harry knew she was thinking carefully. Meciél always tended to revert to human gestures when she was distracted, even the small, habitual ones like that. It always made Harry wonder because it wasn't like that the hair was even there in the first place. But, he supposed that was the complexity of the illusions Meciél was capable of producing.

"If I compare the information that the Knights of the Cross provided for us with ship dossiers, cargo lists, employer deployment and supply requests, I am able to find some significant correlations in the data that may suggest that Lartessa is out of the country," Meciél reported, her tone quite clinical and dry.

"Where?" Harry asked.

"Chechnya is a strong possibility," Meciél answered and smiled coolly. "Lartessa and her Fallen, Imariel, always did take a short-term view on things. They will always choose the path that led to the most chaos in the least amount of time. That region only needs a single spark to start yet another round of fighting."

"Well, what do you..." Harry began, but paused. He spun around, just as two security guards burst into the devastated office, their handguns pulled out and their eyes wide.

"Hold it!" One of them screamed, a thin man with short-cropped hair.

"What the hell happened here?" demanded the other, an overweight man with beady little eyes.

"I can explain," Harry said weakly. He put his hands up very slowly, his wand suddenly disappearing down his sleeve, and took a step towards them. "It was..."

He stopped, glancing over their shoulder, and allowed his eyes to widen with 'true' panic and fear.

"Get down! He's got a gun!" He shouted at the two guards, sheer panic colouring his tone.

Perhaps it was his hasty acting abilities that convinced them, or perhaps it was merely a reflex action brought on by years of experience. Nonetheless, the two guards automatically ducked and began to spin around. At the same time, Harry surged forward, a butterfly-knife appearing in his hands. With a quick, vicious movement, Harry jammed the knife into the thin guard's neck and dragged it across in a classic execution move. A split second later, the knife came out and Harry shoved it through the other man's neck, driving it through the base of the guard's spine. The two bodies dropped to the ground, blood pooling from the first, and Harry stood up, looking disgusted.

"Man, what amateurs," he muttered. Sighing, he summoned the knife into his hand with his wand and pulled out a small object from his coat. "Well, looks like we have no choice. We'll have to burn it."

He tapped his wand on the small object and enlarged it, revealing itself to be a petrol tank full to the brim. Another wave of his wand saw the petrol being sprayed all over the room.

"We better do this the old fashioned way," Harry told Meciél cheerfully. "Can't have them tracing our magic and knowing that we're coming for them, can we? Oh, and on that note..."

Harry stopped here, concentrating very carefully as he forced down his not-so-subtle approach. His wand glowed with an ominous light as Harry essentially layered the remains of his magical signature with something akin to magical gasoline. When this office burned down, his magical signature would go with it.

"You're just happy that you get to burn something," Meciél said with a sigh. "I hope you are aware that you're a pyromaniac."

"It's been ages since I set something on fire," Harry agreed, nodding happily as the last of the petrol.

"It's been three days," Meciél said with a puzzled frown.

"Exactly," Harry grinned and pulled out a small lighter. He flicked it and watched the flame spark from the tip. He glanced down at the

bodies of the two guards before him and shrugged. "Sorry guys. I couldn't let you pass on my description and this is the best way to make sure that this doesn't happen."

He dropped the lighter.

"Boom."

A/N: Yo, guys. I've been on a roll recently and a really good idea struck me for TDL, making me all motivated and stuff. Here's chapter 5 for you. I hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoyed writing it, and for once, I'm not being sarcastic.

Deep in the wilderness of the British Isles, rumoured to be located somewhere deep in the ancient forests of Scotland, stood a great, gleaming castle of incredible magic. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was a learning centre of magic, and had been so for over a thousand years. The four greatest witches and wizards of that time had built Hogwarts, brick by brick, at the bequest of an ancient and powerful wizard. One of the reasons why Hogwarts had stood against time and resisted all attempts at destruction was that the ancient castle was, in a sense, alive. It was common knowledge to most wizards, wand-wielding or otherwise, that magic was most present in life. There were darker areas where those seeking power through more unscrupulous means could attempt to harness the awesome power that was death, but even then that power only came into fruition when merged and conflicted with some semblance of life.

Through methods long forgotten by modern wizards, the four founders of Hogwarts had imbued the very stones of Hogwarts with an enchantment that essentially mimicked life. This allowed for a greater magical retention rate for the permanent features, such as defensive wards and the like, an increased resistance of magical damage (which had been especially useful given the sheer amount of pranksters that Hogwarts managed to produce, to the point where Zonko's was one of the top-five selling business in the Wizarding World), and a complete immunity to the long-lasting damage of magical wear and tear that usually happened with inanimate objects. While some of the Headmaster's liked to propose that Hogwarts had developed a conscience of sorts, they were usually trying to add to the mystique of the school rather than present any solid magical facts. Still, Hogwarts' unique architecture did have some drawbacks. The sheer amount of magic that pumped through the stones led to some odd fluctuations throughout the old building. For reasons far too complicated for the average wizard to understand, this meant that occasionally the staircases would move, doors would become walls, walls would become windows and windows would become some kind of glowing green algae that Albus Dumbledore quite enjoyed on toast.

It also meant that when a student showed up late to class, their incredulous claims of a staircase leading them to a giant room full of chamber pots was probably correct.

It still didn't stop the professors from handing out detentions.

"I don't see how it was my fault," a lanky, gangly and awkward-looking teenager complained loudly.

His red hair clashed horrible with maroon jumper was wearing, but this Weasley had long ago reconciled with the fact that he would look horrible in anything his mother made for him, so he may as well take it like a man- a whinging, whining and complaining man, but a man nonetheless.

"If you hadn't been as late then perhaps Professor McGonagall wouldn't have been as harsh on you," lectured a stern-looking teenager witch.

Curly brown hair fell to her shoulders, covering part of her ever-growing bust, and narrowed dark eyes stared out from behind a forehead permanently marred with frown-marks.

The third of the group sighed.

"Hermione, it's not his fault that the staircases moved on him," the witch said, looking like she interceded in these types of arguments quite often. "Ron, stop complaining. You know how the Professor is."

Amanda flicked her long, blonde hair over her shoulder as Ron nodded glumly. She had grown up quite a bit in the last few months, both physically and mentally. She was a little taller, a little curvier and a little more jaded, the latter reflected in her wary grey eyes.

She was also a little bored.

Perhaps it was the teenage angst that her brothers always liked to tease her about, but Amanda was growing more and more frustrated with the seemingly ideal tranquillity of Hogwarts. The curriculum,

while challenging, bored her. She wanted something useful, something that she'd need in the future when she finally made her stand against the darkness that had been encroaching on her world. There had been a time when she would have been more than happy to sit by and watch the world go by from her cushioned room. Those sentiments died when an ancient demon tried to murder her.

She blamed it all on Harry, really.

Briefly, she wondered what he was doing at the moment and had to suppress a snort. He was probably chatting up some woman while fighting a bunch of demons at the same time. Maybe she could ask him to mail a list of spells she should look up? She had been practising all of the ones he had taught her whenever she had a chance. The D.A. may have been disbanded (due to a lack of an adequate teacher) but the friends closest to her, which were those who had accompanied Neville to the Department of Mysteries and a few others, had kept up the practise a few nights every week. Amanda liked to think that she'd become proficient in all of the spells she knew.

Well, most of them. She hadn't even touched Fiendfyre since the Department of Mysteries and would probably never touch it again. Unwanted thoughts of the events that occurred there rose to mind. Flickering flashes and sensations of pain and blood and fire, fire so bright that it would burn out your eyes, mingled with the agonising screams. Amanda stumbled on her step and squeezed her eyes shut, ignoring her friend's worried glances. Maybe she should have taken her father's suggestion and gone to see a psychiatrist. He had been really worried about her, even if she thought she had detected some disappointment. She had killed a man. How could he not be disgusted with her?

Perhaps it was a good thing that she had reminisced over that incident at that particular point in time. Otherwise, she might not have heard a faint but familiar voice grumbling in annoyance. Amanda's heart skipped a beat and Ron and Hermione turned to her as she stopped.

"Do you hear that?" Amanda breathed.

“What?” Ron asked in puzzlement, exchanging a look with Hermione.

Amanda ignored them as she quickly strode to the corner of the hallway and turned into the one leading to the Great Hall. Her eyes widened and a beaming smile spread across her face. With a sudden burst of speed, she flung herself at the surprised Harry and captured him in a giant hug. Harry grunted, his arms instinctively coming to catch her. The force of her sudden ‘attack’ sent them both sprawling to the floor and Harry swore loudly, a furious scowl on his face as Amanda leaned over his chest, a wide grin spread across her face.

“Hi, Harry,” she chirped.

“Brat?” Harry asked in a resigned tone, rubbing his head and grimacing as he lay on the cold, stone floor.

“Yeah?”

“You’re an idiot.”

Harry pushed Amanda off him, a fierce scowl on his face, and stood up. He made an exaggerated motion of brushing himself off, glaring at the way-too-happy blonde girl as he did so.

“Get over it,” Amanda scoffed, sounding amused as she stood up.

Still, her cheeks were starting to darken and she looked a tad embarrassed at her reaction. Harry noted the way her jumper stretched across her chest and how her legs flexed and grinned lecherously.

“Couldn’t wait to get your hands on me, could you?” he asked.

Amanda rolled her eyes, her cheeks a delicate pink

“Grow up,” Amanda muttered.

“Somebody has,” Harry agreed.

“Amanda!” Somebody called out and Harry turned his head, making out the identities of the two Hogwarts students that were quickly approaching them.

“Oh, it’s you,” Hermione muttered as she noticed Harry.

A scowl came over her face and Harry briefly wondered if she was still about that dead boyfriend of hers...what was that guy’s name again? Then again, maybe she was over that and didn’t like him for another reason. Harry didn’t exactly pay close attention to Hermione. She irritated him for some reason, which usually led to him irritating her until she got pissed off.

“Nice to see you too, big tits....I mean, Hermione,” Harry said and smiled cheekily. “Sorry, bit of a Freudian slip there.”

“Still a pervert, I see,” Hermione shot at him, self-consciously folding her arms over her chest.

“Still a fussy bitch, I see,” Harry shot back smugly.

“Easy there,” Ron cautioned, taking a step forward to stand in between Harry and Hermione.

Harry threw Hermione a sly wink before turning back to Amanda. “So how were your holidays?” he asked carelessly.

“Mom took the family to Disney Land and then we went camping over at the national reserve forest in...”

“Yeah, yeah, I don’t really care,” Harry interrupted her.

“Then why’d you ask me?” Amanda demanded.

“Small talk,” Harry answered with a shrug and smiled at Amanda’s exasperation.

“You never change, do you?” she muttered, more to herself than anybody else. “Well, what about you? Did you do anything fun?”

"I went to Hawaii," Harry answered. He gestured at his face and frowned. "What, you can't tell from the tan?"

"Bloody awesome!" Ron breathed.

"Hawaii... that must have been nice and warm," Amanda said wistfully. "Did anything exciting happen?"

"Well, some assassins tried to kill me. Apart from that, it was all good," Harry told her.

"Assassins, huh?" Amanda murmured. "How'd that work out for them?"

"Not well, Amanda," Harry answered seriously. A dark smile touched at his lips and something gleamed behind his bright emerald gaze. "Not well at all."

"Maybe you should ask him why he's here?" cut in Hermione, annoyed and scowling at Harry. "It'll be just our luck if he's become a student again."

"I've got a meeting with Dumbledore," Harry answered her, his tone a tad cold. "Besides, why the hell would I want to become a student again?"

"Well, we're just about to head to lunch," Amanda said, her mouth suddenly feeling dry. She resisted the urge to shuffle on her feet. "Did you want to come and catch up?"

"The meeting starts in..." Harry started to say, frowning and glancing down at his watch.

"Now, I believe, Harry," somebody called out pleasantly.

Harry turned his head and saw Dumbledore, decked in those really fancy- and weird- robes of his, striding from the direction of his office. His eyes twinkled happily as the elderly man took in the sight of the teenagers before him, his blackened hand mostly hidden under his large, baggy robes.

“Yo’,” Harry greeted lazily.

“However, I suspect that our meeting will take some time,” Dumbledore continued, directing his gaze at Amanda. “Harry might be able to catch up with you at dinner, if he’s not too busy.”

“Good meal... time with the brat... good meal... time with the brat...” Harry pondered out loud. “Good meal... time with the brat - who has grown breasts...”

Amanda flushed and shuffled on her feet self-consciously as Harry winked at her invitingly.

“Come, Harry,” Dumbledore said, smiling faintly. “We have much to discuss, and you will find that we have very little time. Good day, Ms Carpenter.”

“Bye, Harry,” Amanda called out as Harry spun around and began to tail after Dumbledore.

“Yeah, whatever,” Harry grunted, throwing a half-hearted wave back at them.

His mind was more focussed on the meeting ahead of him. Judging by the old man’s performance against Voldemort at the Department of Mysteries, Harry was hoping that the wizard had a few good tricks to share with him or, at least, something interesting.

The first thing that Harry did after he removed his head out of Dumbledore’s pensieve was to hastily check his dark trousers. His fingers touched upon his still-secured belt and he breathed out an exaggerated sigh of relief. He turned to Dumbledore, who was watching Harry with a slightly bemused expression.

“Is something wrong?” the Headmaster asked.

Nearby, Fawkes watched Harry with her beady black eyes. Harry still had a particular hatred against that particular fiery crow (something that he never failed to mention when the Fae bird was around, much

to Dumbledore's amusement) and flashed it a glare as he turned to Dumbledore.

"Just making sure you didn't take any liberties with me when I was otherwise occupied," Harry said dryly.

"Ah, I see," Dumbledore said with dawning comprehension. He stroked his beard and smiled politely. "At what point during the memories did that particular thought occur to you?"

"Around about the time the smarmy little brat was shitting his pants after you set his wardrobe on fire," Harry said bluntly. "That, by the way, was pretty cool. Who knew Lord Voldemort was such a little whiny bastard when he was a kid?"

Harry took a seat before Dumbledore's desk while the aged wizard sat down in his seat, leaning back comfortable into the charm-ridden cushions and exhaling a little noisier than Harry remembered. The Denarian Knight noted this and was inwardly puzzled, before the blackened flesh of Dumbledore's bad arm caught his eye, hidden in the folds of the Headmaster's ornate violent and silver robes. Maybe there was more to this injury than Harry suspected?

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed quietly. Regret flashed in his light-blue gaze, his mouth contorting in an involuntary show of sadness. "Tom was a bright boy, a very gifted wizard, but he did have his... issues."

"He had issues?" Harry repeated and snorted derisively. "Please. Whatever respect I had for Voldemort is gone after watching all of that. The rest of the world may hear "Purebloods rule and Mudbloods suck" and "Avada Kedavra!" whenever he opens his mouth but all I'll hear from now on is "Waaah! I hate my daddy and I'm a whiny little bitch! Waah!"

Dumbledore pressed his fingertips together and did a very good job of not showing how amused he was. If it wasn't for the cocaine addiction that made his eyes do that twinkling thing, Harry wouldn't have been able to tell.

“Seriously,” Harry continued. “There has to be better ways to dealing with a crappy childhood like that. I get the whole ‘killing your parents’ thing. I mean, if I hadn’t offed my Aunt, Uncle and Cousin, well, I wouldn’t be the fine person I am today.”

“If I recall correctly, you murdered the last of your blood family when you were seven years old,” Albus said musingly, the barest hints of disapproval and sadness lingering on his wizened face. “Tom, at least, waited until he was seventeen.”

“Yeah, well, it just means I’m a bigger badass than the self-proclaimed ‘Lord Voldemort,’” Harry said. He frowned, looking thoughtful. “I wonder if there’s a way to mock his name somehow. Voldemort...Voldie? Moldie? Moldie Warts? Moldie Shorts?”

Harry and Dumbledore both paused.

“Nah, I sound like a complete moron when I say crap like that,” Harry dismissed.

Dumbledore chuckled, but then grew serious.

“I have no doubt that you are wondering why I showed that montage of the history of Lord Voldemort. Despite the fact that those were situated far in the past, they have serious repercussions here in the present.”

“The Horcruxes,” Harry supplied and rolled his eyes. “C’mon, you old bastard, even a young whippersnapper like me can focus and pay attention. That memory with that fat guy sort of cinched it, really.”

“Yes,” Dumbledore said heavily. “It seems that one of Lord Voldemort’s paths to true immortality took him to the forbidden realms of soul-splitting. Essentially, a Horcrux is a physical, inanimate object that was crafted or created through powerful magic. This object is then embedded with parts of one’s soul, allowing a link to the mortal plane even after death. They are horrible objects, the methods of creating them barbaric and sadistic.”

“Barbaric? What do you mean?” Harry asked curiously.

"To create a Horcrux, one must commit a great evil, cold-blooded murder," Dumbledore said gravely. "This acts as a ritual, in a way, opening our level of existence to those below."

"A cold blooded murder? That's it? That's a great evil?" Harry asked and scoffed. "Please. I've seen a lot of things that are worse than just a simple murder."

"Do not say such things," Dumbledore snapped, snapped, at Harry. Harry fell silent in surprise, staring up at the aged wizard speculatively. There was strain on his wrinkled face, and a haunted expression in his eyes. Dumbledore took a deep breath and visibly sagged. "My apologies, Harry, but there is more to it than that. To create a Horcrux, one must make a cold-blooded murder of an innocent person. You yourself have killed many times, yes. Tell me, could you drag a small child off the street, slit their throat, mutilate their corpse, ingest their flesh and use their blood as the symbols for a summoning circle, all on a whim?"

Harry was silent.

"The murderer cannot kill under the pretence of righteous judgement or for the greater good," Dumbledore continued, looking very old and tired. "No matter how they delude themselves, they must take a cold-blooded kill and thoroughly enjoy it. They must profane themselves, their souls and this very world with the creation ritual, the contract of sorts with creatures far beyond our realm, deep in the Nevernever where even the Fae do not tread. How such knowledge of these creatures, these things, found its way to this earth, I will never know."

The Horcruxes must be a touchy topic for Dumbledore, Harry concluded. With the way the powerful wizard was acting now, there had to be something in his past that was making him so... defensive. Harry kept his thoughts to himself, his face impassive, and waited silently for Dumbledore to continue.

"To create such a terrible object fractures your very soul, which, I suppose, is the point," Dumbledore said quietly. "By binding pieces of his soul to these objects, Lord Voldemort has gained enormous

power. He has the ability to resist the touch of the mortal coil, as you very well may recall. As well as a certain sense of immortality, Voldemort has also increased his... perception, so to speak. He can see power and magic in ways that you and I will never be able to. This has given him great power.”

“That’s very interesting,” Harry murmured. When Dumbledore regarded him carefully, Harry rolled his eyes. “Oh, relax, not even I’m that stupid. Besides, technically I don’t even own a soul.”

“Ah,” Dumbledore said in understanding. He stroked his beard, regarding Harry curiously. “Are you saying that the Fallen that inhabits your body would disapprove?”

‘Of course I would,’ Meciél spoke into his mind with a sniff. ‘I would not barter away such a valuable possession for the twisted power and knowledge of the J’irth’kyaka,’

‘You know them?’

‘I know of them,’ Meciél answered, and there a tone of disgust in her voice. ‘Half-twisted creatures of creation, failed products of life who’s souls were never properly formed. As such, they can enter neither heaven nor hell. They; can never find peace in their tormented lives. They are immortal, ageless and in constant agony. Those pitiful excuses of existence have nothing to offer one such as myself except their hatred, their jealousy, their anger. It’s a wonder how Voldemort managed to stay relatively sane when bartering with such things.’

“Long answer short, Meciél can get really clingy with the things she likes,” Harry answered dryly. “And she really, really, likes my soul.”

‘It tastes like chicken’ Meciél said mildly. ‘Granted, that’s chicken that’s been thrown into a pit of sulphur and scorched black, but chicken nonetheless.’

‘Don’t like, don’t eat,’ Harry retorted, well aware that Dumbledore was watching him carefully.

The elderly wizard could probably tell he was conversing with Meciél but chose to remain silent out of politeness. Harry was about to address him when he paused.

‘Hey, you’re not really eating bits of my soul, are you?’ He asked Meciél hesitantly.

‘It grows back’, Meciél said blandly, and refused to say anything else on the matter.

“Now I don’t even know if she’s joking,” Harry muttered to himself. He glanced up at Dumbledore and grinned. “Still, an extremely hot fallen angel is nibbling at the edges of my soul... that’s kinda kinky, no?”

“We, Harry, have very differing views of what is ‘kinky’ and what is not,” Dumbledore evaded expertly, although his eyebrows had reached his hairline and his eyes were twinkling.

“Oh, right,” Harry said, nodding quickly. “Sorry. I forgot that you were gay...and that you liked touching little girls.”

“Wouldn’t ‘little boys’ be more appropriate for that particular insult?” Dumbledore asked, shaking his head in mild exasperation.

“Nope,” Harry said cheerfully. “Just goes to show that you’re an inconsistent bastard.”

Dumbledore nodded as if he understood exactly what Harry was saying, which would have alarmed the Denarian greatly since not even he understood half the crap that exited his mouth.

“Look, that was a shit-load of memories and I didn’t understand half of that crap,” Harry commented casually. “Pretend that you’re talking to a blind, crippled, retarded kid in a wheelchair with his hands like ‘this’” here he rose his hands in a bad imitation of a mentally handicapped person.

Dumbledore opened his mouth to begin, having the courtesy to look at least mildly offended at what Harry had just said, when the Denarian stopped him with a gesture of his hand.

"Wait. I think I just called myself retarded," Harry said, frowning. "Why don't you pretend you're talking with a talented, powerful wizard with a penchant for destructive dark arts and the host of an ancient, immortal Fallen angel that could vaporise you in a second if you even implied that I was retarded."

"Simply put, Voldemort has seven Horcruxes," Dumbledore said smoothly. He adjusted a stack of parchments on his desk, glancing down at one of them. "Lord Voldemort has hidden them in places that hold some significance to him. They are most likely to be objects once owned by the Founders of Hogwarts. One of these Horcrux is himself. One of them is his serpent companion, Nagini. One of them is a cup, although I do not know of its location. One, I believe, may be hidden somewhere within this very castle. One of them, I...have my suspicions about, but may be out of reach for now. Two of them have already been destroyed, one giving me this."

He gestured at the blackened husk of his arm.

"Voldemort has defended his Horcruxes with powerful curses and enchantments," Dumbledore said grimly. "I misjudged the strength of these defences and it cost me my arm, almost my life. Were it not for Professor Snape, I would be dead. Were it not for Fawkes, I would be slowly dying. As such, the curse was trapped and contained and I live on."

Fawkes let out slow, sad warble and soared from her perch. She landed on Dumbledore's shoulder and rubbed her plumage against his head. Dumbledore smiled softly as Fawkes warbled again and stroked her head, gazing at the bird with nothing less than utter adoration. Harry was disturbed to see the expression on the one person he respected more than anybody else but stayed silent, scowling at the bird furiously.

"Fawkes is to me what Meciél is to you, Harry," Dumbledore reprimanded mildly. "Allow me my crutch and I will allow you yours."

"Yeah, whatever," Harry muttered. He scratched his head and purposely changed the subject. "'You know, I'm not the best at

puzzles and detective stories,” he admitted. “Give me somebody to kill and I’ll kill them. Give me something to find and you’ll probably find that I’ve blew it up by accident the first time round.”

“I understand that,” Dumbledore said. “I will do my best to locate the Horcruxes. When they are found, I may call upon you to attempt to retrieve them, if you are willing. Once we have possession of them, I am in the belief that you are the one most fit to destroy them.”

“Why’s that?” Harry asked. “Apart from my charming good looks and awesome magical power, of course.”

“The Horcrux defences hold a certain mental component to them,” Dumbledore answered. “They will attempt to sway a lesser wizard with temptations of power and glory. You, and your unique status, will be able to resist that temptation better than others would.”

“Are you sure about that?” Harry asked sceptically. “I’m not so good with temptation. I did sell a Fallen angel my soul, remember.”

Dumbledore smiled faintly.

“I believe you are the best choice,” he said firmly. “There is another reason why I believe that. One of the true and tried methods of a destroying a Horcrux is the judicious application of large amounts of Fiendfyre. There is no wizard in Great Britain, save perhaps Lord Voldemort himself, which has better control over the cursed flame other than you. Naturally, I cannot ask him for his help and I dare not touch it myself, lest I lose control and destroy myself along with it. So I must turn to you.”

“Well, it does piss off that old son of a snake fucker,” Harry mused thoughtfully. “I...er... call him a snake fucker because he looks like a snake. I’m implying his mother was into bestiality.”

Dumbledore merely raised an eyebrow at Harry’s justifications and remained silent

“Yeah, sure, I’m in,” Harry said carelessly, after a few moment’s had passed and the penetrating stare that Dumbledore was given him was starting to becoming annoying. “But!”

He leaned forward, placing his hands on the desk and narrowing his eyes.

“I distinctly recall being told that I’d get some personalised training from you,” Harry continued. “I have a good memory, a great memory even. Ask Meciél. I never forget something important. That better not have been a trick just to get me here...”

“You may relax, Harry,” Dumbledore placated Harry with a soft smile, gently motioning for Harry to calm down. He sighed and stood up from his chair, the large phoenix on his shoulder keeping its balance quite well. “Yes, I have shown you a weakness of Lord Voldemort’s immortality. That said, even if all of the Horcruxes are destroyed, it will merely mean that once he is killed, Voldemort cannot be revived. It will not detract from his power at all.”

“He is a tough bastard,” Harry muttered sourly, distinctly remembering the three times he had clashed with the Dark Lord.

Despite his Hellfire-boosted spells, despite knowing magic that no teenager had the right to know, despite reflexes and athletic skills that put Olympic athletes to shame, Voldemort had proven to be a superior opponent. Whatever dark magic ran through his thin, pale body made him quick and strong, and that was before he took hold of a wand.

“Voldemort is a powerful wizard,” Dumbledore said gravely. “He has undergone procedures and rituals that would have crushed a lesser wizard and come up on top. He will shrug off and regenerate all but the most severe physical and magical wounds, although your skills in this area probably exceed his. His spells will be tens-times more powerful than the average Auror-class wizard. His reflexes and duelling style is unique to himself and quite possibly one of the most dangerous duellists in the world. His stamina, unmatched by even myself. His greatest asset, however, is his mind. His ability to analyse a situation in a split-second and react accordingly will match even

your own superior senses. I have heard some compare Lord Voldemort to a modern-day Salazar Slytherin. That is incorrect. Voldemort surpassed Slytherin long ago.”

“Did you wanna suck his dick any longer or are you done?” Harry muttered sourly. He kicked at the ground, looking and feeling annoyed. “That’s a real nice de-motivational speech you have there. Way to point out that Voldemort superior to me in every way... although I might have to contradict you in some places. I’m not a pushover, you know.”

“I am not underestimating your skills, Harry, just as I am not underestimating his,” Dumbledore explained softly. His eyes were serious and hard, his mouth pressed in a firm line. “You have done well for yourself. In seven years, you have grown from a small, magically inferior child into a battle-hardened warrior who has stood toe to toe with far superior foes and won. In another five or so years, I have no doubt that you could even rival myself in every way, I, who have had over a century of training. But we don’t have five years. We don’t have one year. This war has already begun.”

“Great,” Harry sigh unhappily. “Way to make me feel good, while dashing all my hopes spectacularly. Excuse me if I don’t believe you and try to ‘off that bastard anyway.’”

“I am not saying that you are destined to lose,” Dumbledore said calmly, looking as serene as ever. “I am merely saying that your battle with Lord Voldemort, as dictated by prophecy, would go much smoother if you were to...how do they say it? Ah, yes... if you were to have a ‘trump card’.”

“A trump card?” Harry repeated, narrowing his eyes. “What does that mean?”

“Do you know how wand-magic works, Harry?” Dumbledore asked the Denarian, ignoring the question. “Some wizards, those who have labelled themselves ‘True’, draw magic from this world. They find power in their existence, from their own emotions and dreams and hopes- or hate. Wizards who wield wands, however, draw power from

somewhere else. It is a realm beyond most perceptions, a realm of pure...power, for lack of a better word."

"Tell me something I don't know," Harry snapped, although the suddenly interested and eager look on his face probably belied his harsh tone.

"This power is raw, unfocussed," Dumbledore continued. He stroked his beard absently, his eyes flickering to his bookshelf where numerous tomes jutted out. "There are many theories on how we use our magic, but they all have the same underlying principle. Language."

Harry was silent.

"Language, to humans, holds the key to our perceptions. Language influences the way we interact with our world and each other. Language passes on our emotions, our hate and our love. The type of language we learn even influences the way our mind literally thinks. We think in language, we speak in language, we see in language, we touch in language. Tell me, Harry, have you ever the phrase 'the pen is mightier than the sword?'"

Harry nodded.

"For us, it is quite true," Dumbledore said with a gentle smile. He lifted up his quill and his wand, a curiously-shaped stick of gleaming wood that Harry couldn't identify. "Between these two objects, my personal wand and an ordinary quill, it is the quill that, in essence, is more powerful than my wand."

"I don't understand," Harry said slowly. "Is it enchanted or something? Can it stab through bone?"

"It can make words, Harry," Dumbledore said gravely. "Language is nothing without words. But words are just noises, simple sounds that our mouths make. Language is nothing without the word and the word is nothing without meaning. We attribute meanings to words. For example, 'water' is just a set of sounds. It is when we apply meaning to it that it becomes comprehensible. For a split second,

consciously and unconsciously, our minds link the meaning of 'water' with our memories, experiences and, more importantly, our emotions. Water may be the beloved lifesaver of the stranded man in the desert. Water may also be the hated murderer of the parent whose child drowned in the river. Meaning, Harry, is everything."

"I..." Harry started, but frowned and stopped.

Even within his mind, Meciél was silent. Ancient and terrible she may be, even she knew that there were areas where she was not all-knowing. Dumbledore clearly had something very important to say.

"Our realm of power, the realm where we draw magic through our wands from, it is connected to this world just as it is connected to the Nevernever and countless other worlds," Dumbledore continued. There was passion in his eyes, and Harry could see why the man had decided to become a professor of all things. "It has no direct impact on us, but we, wielders of the tool known as language, have an impact on it. The language we use, the meanings we attribute to words, the emotions we conjure for them all, they all resonate within the realm of power. Overtime, these resonations can cause a relatively small but permanent effect on this realm. When these words are utilised properly, and with the right focus, we can draw the resonations out into this mortal world. These resonations, which heed no scientific laws, produce the effect we know as wand-magic. Transfiguration, charms, curses and counter-curses are all the results of a resonations impact on our world. We then guide these resonations into existence with out wands."

"Wand-Magic theory, 101A," Harry said quietly. "Interesting, sure, but I don't see how it's useful."

"Meaning creates the words, words create the language, language creates the meaning," Dumbledore murmured. "It is the ancient languages from all over the world that have the greatest resonance in this realm, simply because the age of the resonance itself. As a rule, older resonances are more powerful. However, without meaning and context, the word is simply a word. As language influences the way we think, it is very hard to use the incantations of a wizard who does

not speak the same language as us. Hence, many of our spells are simply 'translated' versions of the older languages."

"You're going to be teaching me ancient spells?" Harry hazarded a guess.

"In a way," Dumbledore replied mysteriously. "Now, as a rule, it is generally agreed upon that the Ancient Egyptians were the first civilisation to create significant resonance in the wand-magic realm of existence. This is attributed to a number of factors. Population is one, for example. Simply put, the Egyptians were the first civilisation to have a population large enough with a well-developed language to create the necessary ripples for a proper resonance. In the late sixteenth-century, the International Confederation of Wizards decreed that the official language of spells would be Latin. Latin was a very popular language spoken by millions during the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. More importantly, it was the official language of the Church; hence, it would not fall from our memories as easily as other languages had. It is quite interesting to study these central years, as wizard persecution was still running rampant. Why, the Head Warlock himself had to fend..."

Dumbledore stopped at Harry's blank gaze. He chuckled to himself, his eyes twinkling in amusement.

"Forgive me, Harry," he said cheerfully. "I seem to have gone off into a tangent all on my own. Where was I? Ah, yes. The ancient Egyptians were the first magical civilisation to create a proper resonance. Granted, their methods of wielding and controlling this resonance were far inferior to the wand-based focuses we use today, but generally, it is an academically accepted fact that no wieldable resonance predates them. However, for scholars such as myself- and there are not many like me- we tend to regard this rule as lacking.'

Harry frowned.

"For you see, Harry, the realm of power that we draw our magic from is connected to countless worlds," Dumbledore said wisely, nodding to himself. "Yes, yes, thousands upon thousands of other worlds-millions, even- all brushing up against this realm. Some you may

know, the Nevernever, for example, contains countless of these words, most which have never been mapped before by human hands. These countless worlds have inhabitants, some so far different from us that we could not even begin to perceive them as they truly are. But, to some, we are the ones who are so different from them. Nevertheless, these inhabitants have one thing in common, Harry. Can you tell me what it is?"

"Language," Harry breathed, understanding dawning on him. He licked his dry lips and spoke. "These worlds have language of their own, and they're all connected to the realm of wand-magic."

"Exactly," Dumbledore beamed. He looked pleased. "Those languages, some far more ancient than our own, have words. Those words have meaning. Granted, the meaning and emotion behinds most of these languages is far beyond us. We are too dissimilar, too alien to one another. But, there are a select few whose resonance we, as human beings, are able to grasp and utilise. During the battle with Lord Voldemort at the Ministry of Magic, I utilised some of these words. These words came from a series of scrolls that were discovered in the ruins of what is known as the Temple of Solomon. Lord Voldemort knew it as the Psalm of Ar'uck'shei. I know it as the language of the angels."

"Angelic power?" asked Harry, his voice tinged with awe.

He, of all people, knew exactly how powerful the holy power could be. A Sword of the Cross, a powerful holy artefact, had chosen him of all people to be its wielder against the forces of darkness (Harry still found this terribly amusing, considering he was consorting with the minions of Hell). The blade could bathe itself in silver flame, cut through supposedly unblockable spells and grant him sheer supernatural luck.

"It is not easy, Harry," Dumbledore warned. "Tell me, how can you perceive the hopes, dreams and emotions of a being you have never met? How can your mind, physically created to think, feel and act in a certain way, break past the structural limitations of your brain and empathise with the denizens of a world shaped so differently from our own? It is like..."

Dumbledore paused, contemplating his words.

“It is like trying to imagine a new colour,” he said at last. “How could you even begin to comprehend it, a colour that the eyes of a human being have never seen before? What’s more, how could you understand it well enough to describe it to somebody else?”

Harry was silent.

“That’s only the beginning, Harry,” Dumbledore said passionately. “There are Words of the Drakon, for they have language. There are Words of the Fae, for they too have language. There are Words of demons, of angels, from a multitude of beings- most that human eyes have never glanced upon before. These Words are old, their resonance ancient and, for some unknown reason, strangely potent in our particular world. I will teach you how to use these words. I will teach you how to reproduce sounds that our throats cannot physically create, that our ears cannot physically hear. I will teach you how to utilise these Words in combat, from Words that turn matter into oblivion to Words that can summon entire oceans upon our enemies. In the end, Harry, you will have a power that the Dark Lord knows not. You will have the Words of the Worlds, and you will crush your enemies with them.”

Harry’s slow smile became a full-brown grin.

“Then let’s get started, shall we?”

A/N: This is late, but I've been struggling on this damn scene for a while now. The first part is basically one giant summary- the part I got really stuck on. It came to the point where I pretty much decided to use a cliff notes version or remain stuck for the next month or so, so that's why it might seem rushed. This is a fairly big chapter, so enjoy. Thanks to Dakatim and those at DLP for their reviews, which helped me in editing this story.

EDIT: Spell-check done for the chapter. Most errors that were pointed out to me have been removed. Gimme a shout if you noticed anymore.

For Harry, the next two weeks became a strange mixture of tediousness and excitement. There had been two more Order meetings that he had participated in, although his idea of participation was teasing Tonks, insulting Snape and almost coming to blows with Moody. Really, Harry was almost certain that Dumbledore had picked the members of his Order of Phoenix on mental state alone. Who needed awesome wizards with powerful fighting abilities when you had a bunch of nutcases? Insanity should inspire more fear into the Death Eaters than a legion of Aurors.

Or not.

It wasn't really his problem, he guessed. It was Dumbledore's Order and he was responsible for them, for their victories and for their defeats, although he was certain that there would be a helluva lot more losses than wins. Harry just wished that he was working alongside some wand-wizards who were a little more focussed on doing what needed to be done. Although, Kingsley, the dark-skinned Auror, had treated Harry with nothing less than courtesy, and hadn't shot down any of his more radical ideas like the other Order members had. Tonks, also, seemed to have quietened a bit. Harry didn't know what mental trauma she had been through but the other day at one of the meetings she had actually agreed with him on something, although she looked like she loathed herself from even considering the execution of known and captured Death Eaters. It could have been because she had been at Azkaban on an errand when several of the Death Eaters had broken out.

The Order meetings were tedious. So was trying to find more information on the location of several key members of the Order of Blackened Denarius. Harry didn't know his kin could be so damn secretive and spent more than a few sleepless nights chasing up some lead or another. He was almost tempted to summon Cessbulby of the Winter Fae and see if she had any information, but had decided that it might be a good idea to keep out of Maeve's sight for a while. She owed him part of a debt, after all, and the Fae did not like being in debt. While they would not directly break it, Harry didn't even want to consider what methods Maeve might use to wriggle her way out of it. Whatever it was, it wouldn't be good for him.

Harry's thoughts briefly touched on Amaris, visions of the pale-skinned eight-year-old girl with solemn emerald eyes swimming in his mind, but he forced them down. He would be the first to admit, but only to very few people, that he almost missed the little brat, which is why he wanted to avoid Maeve. Perhaps it was the coward's way out, but summoning Maeve meant possible contact with his daughter, and he really didn't want to know how much further Maeve had twisted the half-fae hybrid. There'd come a time for that, but it wasn't now.

The high point of the last two weeks would have to be, without a doubt, the personal lessons he was receiving from Dumbledore. He had been to two more meetings with Dumbledore in his office, trying to create and develop the charms he would need to create a Word. Dumbledore, of course, had mastered spells like these on his own decades ago. However, these spells were used to modify the very structure of his body to produce the eerily foreign sounds. It was just as much a magical change as it was a physical change, which was a pity because if it was just the latter then Meciél could have done it for him in a flash. For reasons Harry didn't fully understand but Meciél agreed with, Dumbledore had recommended that Harry focus on the actually learning how to say the word while Meciél used her considerable mental abilities to concentrate on the hardest parts of the Word, the synchronisation of alien emotions, concepts and language into something that the human brain could interpret into stimuli that could produce the necessary computational concepts needed to summon the resonance.

Harry only had a faint idea of what that meant. He tried to focus on the 'how' and allowed Meciél to worry about everything else. It was hard for him, since he was trying to alter his body's physiology with a non-verbal, wandless spell while combating the natural magical resistance of a wand-wizard without interfering with the subtle nature of the spells he needed. That was hard enough as it was. Dumbledore had told him that it had taken him years to learn his first Word, but as Harry practised he had the feeling he could summon one any day now.

If he was lucky.

It was just a few hours after one of these lessons with Dumbledore. He had disappeared from the boundaries of Hogwarts after a particularly filling dinner. Dumbledore had once more invited him to sit at the Gryffindor table with his 'old friends' and catch up. The reactions of the students hadn't been too surprising. There was the same mixture of awe and wonder from the lower year levels, who knew of his exploits. There was the same disdain from the older years, who had actually met him before. Then, there were the few individual reactions of those who had more or less spent time around Harry in the last two years. Hermione huffed and muttered things under her breath. Ron grinned and would have clapped him on the back if not for a warning glance that Harry had sent his way. Luna had smiled serenely and waved hello from the Ravenclaw table. Ginny had watched him with stars in her eyes- apparently she hadn't forgotten how he had saved her a few months ago in the Department of Mysteries. Amanda looked strangely annoyed but smiled it off, greeting Harry sincerely, her mouth open and closing as she chattered on needlessly. Harry ignored the brat the same way he had for the past two years.

Neville's reactions had surprised him the most, though. When he had caught sight of Harry, he had squeaked- squeaked- loudly and stared at him in stark terror. Harry distantly recalled how the pudgy Gryffindor had stared at Snape back in his fourth year. The stare he received was worse than that. It took a moment before he realised that Neville had been a witness to his fight at the Department of Mysteries. He had seen him battle Lord Voldemort and Vesper. He had had to repress a snort when it occurred to him. No wonder the pathetic little weakling had been scared of him.

The companionship had been lacking, since Amanda was pretty much the only one he could stand to talk to for more than five minutes (after all, he had trained her well). He didn't mind Ginny's company that much either, since all she did was blush constantly in his presence and attempt to fawn all over him and, hell, he liked the attention. Luna's willowy frame also held his attention for a few moments when she wondered over, although Amanda had been a little upset at the girl for some reason or other and Luna had quickly left. Still, the dinner was to kill for and Harry had to admit that it rivalled anything else he could have gotten his hands on, mostly because there was a lot of it and it was all free. Those little green bastards really knew how to cook, although he was a little wary of the mashed potatoes. For some strange reason, any thoughts involving the over-enthusiastic house-elves mashing raw spuds made him shudder. There was probably some kind of twisted implications in there somewhere, but fucked if Harry was going to go and look for it.

Harry reappeared in the old rotten stairway leading up to his shabby apartment and immediately stiffened. Something was wrong. The flickering and buzzing fluorescent tubes that usually annoyed the crap out of him were all dead and the stairwell was completely covered in darkness. Normally, Harry wouldn't have found that odd- the place was a shit hole, after all- but his keen eyes immediately noticed (at Meciél's prodding) the lack of windows. He knew that there was a streetlight directly in front of it yet and Harry couldn't see it from where he was standing. This wasn't your run-of-the-mill charm.

'So...trap?' Harry thought wryly, trying to peer through the darkness without any success.

'Trap,' Meciél confirmed. 'I can feel something, but it's hiding itself well.'

'Goody,' Harry thought sarcastically, accessing Hellfire without a second thought and allowing the brutal power to rush through his body.

After possessing Hellfire for almost ten years, grasping, moulding and utilising the searing rush of power had become instinctual. Harry

brushed away the drug-like mood-swings, forcing the hatred and fury that swelled up within him into a little ball at the back of his mind, and channelled it to his limbs. His entire body felt like it was on fire as something gleamed past his emerald eyes, the irises warping as they became wreathed in flame. His wand, which he held up with his right hand, glowed as long-carved runes helped the magical focus absorb and contain the Hellfire flowing through it without vaporising the relatively fragile piece of wood.

“Tell me,” Harry called out, his eyes flickering from left to right.

He began to walk up the stairs, every one of his senses trained on the darkness for a hint of something. “Who’s come to kill me now? Denarians? Death Eaters? Vampires? Zombies? Mummies? Nazis? Are you Nazis?”

There was no answer. There was no sound at all, actually, apart from the echoes of his footsteps as he slowly and deliberately made his way up the stairs and reached his floor. He briefly wondered if the other residents were dead, although it wouldn’t be a great loss to society if they were. Most of them were lowlifes in one way or another, drug addicts, gang members, illegal aliens and prostitutes-unattractive ones at that as well.

Harry strode down the hallway leading to his apartment confidently, a hint of swagger in his stance. He looked completely relaxed, almost as if he were daring the enemy to surprise him from the darkness and attack.

“Magically-induced darkness...or is it?” Harry mused, poking his wand at the shroud of darkness around him. “That’s a nice trick. You’ve layered a spell on the actual walls and floor of the building. The reason that there’s no light is because the lights are on the other side of the spell. This could be dangerous for me.”

The hallway remained silent and Harry pouted.

“C’mon, you fuck-heads!” he snapped. “I’m all for grandstanding before the fight but that’s only because I expect there to be a fight. You’re a stupid weak piece of crap!”

Harry cocked his head as if he were straining to listen to something beyond whatever spell he was standing in. He shrugged his shoulders after a few moments.

"No outraged denials, full-blown attacks or posturing of your own," he mused. "That rules out half the people that want to kill me. Incidentally, all of the people that actually could are on that list as well. You must suck."

Suddenly, there was a rustle of sound behind him. Harry whirled around, his eyes narrowing. Strangely enough, he made no attempt to banish the darkness away and stood completely still. Nothing appeared and Harry frowned. He turned around and suddenly there it was.

From out of the darkness came a beast with burning orange eyes that gave Harry glimpses of its body. Large bull-like horns sat on the head of a black and white striped tiger-like creature. He briefly caught a glimpse of a sigil burned into the forehead as the creature raised a paw and brought it down on Harry with lightning speed. Harry made a choking noise as the paw tore right through him, slamming into the darkness-coated floor with a huge smash. The ground rumbled and there was a distant sound of wood shattering and cracking.

Harry clenched over, whimpered gurgles escaping from his throat as he clutched his chest. He staggered forward and then, out of nowhere, burst out of laughing, straightening his shoulders and revealing a perfectly healthy body to the expectant beast before him.

"Yeah, I was right," he said, still chuckling. "If you were smart, you would have noticed how I wasn't swaying on my feet- I haven't got that part down yet. Like I said, you..."

Harry's voice drifted off as he faded away, clothes, wand and all, his form melting into the air. Floating in the middle of his 'mass' was his wand, runes glowing with crimson light. The light faded and the wand clattered to the ground.

"...suck!" the real Harry concluded, stepping from behind his illusion.

His smirking face was illuminated by the blazing fire that he held in his hand, one palm clutching the fire and the other stretching it back as one might do when trying to flick a rubber band. Without anymore hesitation, Harry hurled the fireball forward the temporarily revealed Denarian. Sound burst through the air, a loud whooshing noise as the fireball sucked in the oxygen around and almost doubled in size. The creature snarled, and then yelped as it was struck on the chest. The ground shuddered; there was a rumbling boom that resounded through the darkness-coated hallway. The Denarian was hurled backwards, yelping and whining like a kitten that had just been kicked, its fur singed and a great big patch of scorched flesh sizzling on its flank. The vestige of the spell seemed to disrupt the spell around them, several long fiery trails searing through the shadows on the roof and walls. Beams of light shot from the cracked enchantment, as well as the whoosh of rushing air as a wind formed to fill in the vacuum the fireball had created.

The bestial Denarian finally slammed into something beyond the darkness and Harry heard the tell-tale sign of wood and mortar smashing apart. Harry winced at the sound.

“Man, that’s going to take me ages to fix that many memories,” he grumbled. “Might be easier to kill the lot of them, really. And where the hell is that stupid sword? Why the hell do I keep it around if it’s not even going to warn me of shit like this?”

‘I believe you threw it against the wall of your apartment in a fit of anger,’ Meciél reminded him amusedly.

‘Hey, I don’t get angry,’ Harry scoffed. ‘I get prissy.’

‘How womanly of you.’

‘Bite me,’ Harry grumbled.

His mental conversation was cut short as the ground beneath his feet trembled and Harry started, glancing down with widening eyes. He jumped back just as something loomed from the darkness of where he’d been standing. Apparently the other Denarian hadn’t been alone.

A giant ant, the size of a horse with pincers that looked like they could cut through a vault, was briefly illuminated by the glowing purple sigil on its head as he dove at him. There was a clang; pincers meeting bone-wrym wings as Harry gritted his teeth furiously, trying to hold back the immense weight of the creature. He lifted his wand, an incantation spilling from his lips, but the ant jumped back and disappeared into the darkness before he could finish.

"I remember her," Harry growled and looked distinctly annoyed. "She's that Denarian from the Department of Mysteries. Always knew that could come back to bite me in the arse."

'A little less grandstanding, a little more killing,' Meciell advised.

'Can you see anything, because I can't see shit in this darkness?' Harry thought, his wings flying back into his back and disappearing. 'I'm tempted to bring down this darkness, but I'd probably need Fiendfyre or something and I kinda like my apartment.'

'It has been compromised,' Meciell said calmly. 'Perhaps we should cut out losses.'

'Why the fuck do they always have to blow up my house?' Harry snarled in his head.

The ground rumbled before his feet, threatening to throw him off balance, and Harry sighed, rolling his eyes.

"That's never a good sign," he muttered. "Always involves something dangerous and epic... kinda like that!"

Before him, a tidal wave of thick, gooey mud was rushing at him. It filled the corridor, pushing and being restrained against the enchantment of darkness that coated the walls. Harry only had a split second to comprehend what was going on before it was on him, pushing and tugging at him with great force. He was launched off his feet, rocketing towards the stairwell where the mud fell like a waterfall, and disappeared underneath the surface. Mud sloshed and squelched as he was sucked under, but apart from that there was

silence as his opponent waited to see if that had done it. Suddenly, at other end of the hallway, the mud slowed. There was an odd glow coming from beneath the surface, a powerful heat that was cooking the wet mud almost instantaneously. In a matter of seconds, a large patch of the mud had become as solid as clay and the tidal wave halted.

“Frendo!” came Harry’s muffled voice from beyond the mud.

A large section of the hardened mud disappeared underneath a powerful blast of purple light as an eerie screeching noise filled the air. The blast of purple continued forward, vaporising hardened and wet mud with total ease. Shrapnel flew, bouncing off the enchantment of darkness and ricocheting around the hallway. Harry reappeared from the underneath the mud, caked in the stuff as he glared at the other Denarian, looking angry.

“Bitch!” He spat, bringing up his wand in a whip-like gesture.

Fire coiled at the tip, crashing through the enchantment and another wall as the ant-Denarian scrambled along the roof in a flash. It snapped at her retreating back, leaving a long lash against her armour, a gouge that glowed with heat. She disappeared into the darkness a second later, just as the wall Harry had crashed through could be heard crumbling from the other side. Harry caught a glimpse of the wall through the long tear through the darkness and winced.

“Damn!” He cursed. “There goes my living room. Fuck this! Avada Kedavra! Avada Kedavra! Avada Kedavra!”

Three jets of green lanced forward, illuminating the dark hallway with an eerie glowing green. Harry caught a glimpse of the ant and watched as it morphed in on itself, transforming back to a slender female. Her light blue eyes met his own as she twirled and dodged two of the spells in a dance of amazing dexterity, summoning a large crystallised slab of earth to block the third. It shattered as the Killing Curse impacted on it, shards of twinkling crystal whizzing through the air. With a tap of her foot, the shards were suddenly launched at Harry but falling short by a few metres.

“Ex...” Harry started, and then stopped in surprise.

As soon as the shards touched the ground, it had rumbled and suddenly there was a row of spiked crystals shooting towards him. Harry finished the incantation and his wand spewed out a massive jet of flames at the spikes, the force behind the spell enough to halt their advance. The crystals shattered under the heat, sublimation turning the solids straight into a misty yellow gas. As soon as the gas emerged and brushed against the flame, it promptly exploded in a loud boom with enough force that Harry was thrown off his feet and back towards the mud-slicked staircase. The railing had been torn apart by the tidal wave and Harry let out a startled shout as he toppled over the side, his fingers scrabbling uselessly against the mud-covered stone. His wings shot out, slamming into brick and mortar and his descent stopped with a sudden bump. He hung there, suspended in the air with wings of bone, a scowl on his face.

“As you can see,” Meciél said smoothly, her illusion appearing before him. She appeared to be floating in the air, observing the surroundings carefully. “Verrine...”

“Who?” Harry interrupted.

“The female Denarian,” Meciél answered.

“Ah,” Harry uttered in comprehension.

“She is weaker than you, yes, but she is also far more experienced,” Meciél said as Harry started to sway on his wings, as if he were sitting on a swing. Meciél watched him with no emotion on her face and continued. “She’s using your affinity for fire-based spells against you.”

“Well, I guess I’ll just have to change my pattern of attack,” Harry muttered, swinging up and down the stairway shaft.

His feet touched the back of the wall and he gave himself a kick off. At the same time, he used his wings to give him one big push and soared through the air, landing on the edge of the twisted and ruined

handrail. He looked up and flinched as another row of spiked crystals shot at him.

“Evertoxuro!” He bellowed and a searing jet of flames roared from his wand, vaporising the crystals before they came to close. The resulting explosion made him stumble and he staggered, brushing against the darkness-coated walls. “Oh, right, the gas. I guess it’s time to go Transfiguration.”

‘Transfiguration?’ Meciél thought in surprise. ‘In all honesty, your skill in that branch of wand-magic is less than useful. Your attempts generally result in objects exploding or imploding on themselves, depending on how badly you erred.’

“Exactly,” Harry said with a grin.

He swiped his wand and focussed on transfiguring a row of cacked mud down the hall into something else. He didn’t even attempt to control it, just pushing forward copious amounts of Hellfire to the spell. The mud morphed, twisting and pulsating in on itself. For a moment, it looked like it might be changing into something else, but then it cracked and exploded in a blast of light and a puff of smoke. Harry did the same for a couple of broken bricks and watched as smoke filled the hallway, obscuring the light pouring in from the rips in the darkness. Whatever advantage Verrine had, apparently being able to see him past the enchantment, was going to be greatly reduced.

Harry shot forward, his feet stepping on hardened mud and cracking it. His wand twirled in his fingers as he deflected a blast of pure energy that shot out from the shadows. It ricocheted off Harry’s deflection and shot back towards the caster. Harry heard a sudden intake of breath, Hellfire sizzled in his ears and temporarily enhancing his senses, and smiled grimly. As Verrine emerged from the shadows, ominous pools of energy crackling in her hands, Harry’s wand swiped upwards as he attempted to transfigure the other Denarian’s shirt. At such close range, Harry was able to see Verrine’s startled expression as her blouse disappeared in a small puff of fire and smoke. The blast wouldn’t have been powerful enough to hurt a normal human, let alone the enhanced host of a Denarian. However, as the smoke drifted away, Harry’s eyes widened and they automatically drifted

down at the tattered shirt and the large amount of skin Verrine had exposed.

It was all the time Verrine needed and, as Harry was momentarily distracted, she curled up her fingers. Shards of crystal and mud shot towards the appendage and Harry shook his head, jumping back and blasting a jet of green light at her. The spinning sphere of mud, shards and debris took the spell with only minor damage as it formed into a giant representation of Verrine's hand. Verrine, her face oddly blank, thrust her hand forward and the muddy hand, spanning the length and width of the hallway, complied. It encircled him and closed around him. Verrine snapped her hand shut and the giant hand crushed around him, squeezing at him tightly.

A small lull in the battle descended over the hallway. Verrine was panting as she held her hand up, keeping the draining spell clutched around the Denarian Knight in an attempt to kill him. For a moment, she looked like she believed he was dead. However, a second later, the hand was hardening, large cracks ripping through it. It suddenly crumbled away and Harry stepped forward, his clothes muddy and his left arm cradled to his chest. He levelled the wand at Verrine, who only had enough time to widen her eyes.

"Crucio!"

The spell hit her square on her exposed chest and she was blasted back into the floor. There was enough light seeping in from the various tears and rips in the enchantment of darkness to let Harry see Verrine's thrashing and flailing form as her piecing screams filled the air. Harry watched impassively, a grim smile on his face. He released the curse and watched as Verrine panted on the ground, unwilling tears leaking from her eyes. The Cruciatus Curse was pain to a degree that even a Fallen could barely withstand.

"As a complete and utter bastard once said to me, flashy spells are no match for my power," Harry told her coldly. "Crucio!"

Verrine screamed again, her dark hair flying about as she writhed before him. Harry pumped Hellfire through the curse, content in Verrine's screams. There was a certain amount of satisfaction of

bringing an enemy to their knees before you, Harry found and smiled gleefully.

Verrine let out another piercing scream, pausing only to take a breath, and thrashed uncontrollably. Her back arched and Harry frowned as she flung her hands out in her pain. Something rippled through the air and suddenly the hallway was rocking, the sounds of wood breaking and mortar crushing filling the air. It was as if an earthquake was centred right underneath them.

Harry was launched off his feet and just in time as well as the floor cracked and fell apart where he had been standing. He was slammed into a wall and let out a vicious round of swearwords as his ribs were cracked again.

“Fucking hell!” he growled, tumbling to the ground. He struck his nose and his eyes watered, pain flaring on his face. “They just healed, for fuck’s sake!”

Verrine was gasping as she staggered up, her palm held out in front of her. Her impassive face was contorted in rage, her entire body shivering from the after effects of the powerful unforgivable curse. Dark energy pooled in her palm, forming into a sphere of blazing fire. At the same time, she put two fingers at her mouth and let out a sharp whistle. From the other side of the corridor, the other Denarian, the tiger-like creature that Harry had hurled aside before, unsteadily stood up. The whistle seemed to have roused it up, but it looked disorientated and was making soft, whimpering noises. Much of its fur was missing and a large spot of flesh on its flank was blackened and burnt, but it staggered towards Harry mindlessly, snarling and baring its teeth threateningly.

“Ah,” Harry uttered, glancing at both Verrine and the other Denarian.

The present circumstances, with the accounting factors, suddenly rushed through his mind, including the distance of the enemies, location of rubble and debris, position of his wand and so forth. Meciél blazed through him, already knitting his broken bones together.

“Meciél,” Harry said out loud. “Sleep.”

‘Very well.’

Harry concentrated, his eyes fluttering shut as he calmed his breathing. His throat began to itch and Harry had to restrain a shudder as he felt his neck elongate and extend out. At the same time, as Harry began to prepare his body to physically say the Word, Meciél began to fiercely concentrate on the much harder part of the process. In order to access the resonance he wanted, he needed to think and believe like the one that created it. He had to completely submerge himself in the thought patterns of a species when his brain was physically incapable of thinking that way. It was little wonder why Dumbledore had labelled this the hardest art of Wand-Magic that one could learn- but never master. There was a flaring pain in his head, a stabbing heat that was completely different to anything he had ever felt before and, around him, the world changed.

He opened his eyes and suddenly he wasn’t human anymore. His perception changed, the world becoming dimmer and brighter at the same time, full of colours that he couldn’t even begin to describe. He flared his two noses...images of weird fox-like creatures stalking flying bats...no, not flying bats, the...whatever the word was, Harry couldn’t quite make it out, as if his ears were selectively blocking it from his consciousness, making it into nothing more than a static buzz of some kind. He raised his –TZZZZZZZZZZZ!- a primitive curved stick with a weird array of spikes at the end that he just knew would be wielded with great efficiency, especially when the hunt for sustenance began.

They were always hungry, but it was always worst after they had awoken. They worked as a –TZZZZZZZZZZZ!- trap –TZZZZZZZZZZZ!- even as –TZZZZZZZZZZZ!- interfered. They were long-necked, lanky and skeletal, six sets of eyes on what could only be a torso of some kind...no mouth that he could discern, dressed in –TZZZZZZZZZZZ!- , all of the uniformed colour of –TZZZZZZZZZZZ!-, beating them back with fire, hot searing fire.

Half of them would starve, but the other half would live and it would be time for the –TZZZZ...’thkl-, the never-ending cycle of the –TZZZZ...go’thkl-, and they would gather and howl at the moons and

chant “TZZZZ...’thkl”, “TZZZZ... go’thkl”, “TZZZZ...a’rgo’thkl”, ““TZZZZ...krolin’a’rgo’thkl” before they would retreat to the places of dwelling re-enter the cycle that made them them.

Deep in Harry’s mind, past the sudden flashes of memory and perception that were not his, he knew that he was accessing the language of a creature beyond his understanding. It was a creature of migration, of hibernation, a weird mixture of the two that lasted for some unit of time he didn’t quite grasp. For a split-second, Harry could full empathise with these beings completely. Their values, customs and thoughts all made perfect sense to him.

He didn’t know where they came from, what they were, or if they were even still alive in one fashion or another. How long had this language been resonating in the vast plane that wand-magic was drawn from? Hundreds of years? Thousands? Millions? Billions, even? All he knew was that they placed a deep meaning on their equivalent of sleep, a deep meaning that he could fully appreciate. His eyes stared open blankly, seeing both the indiscernible-coloured skies and the darkness-shrouded hallway at the same time. It seemed like hours, but it had only been a split-second, when he opened his mouth and chanted alongside the phantom creatures that drifted in and out of the corner of his eyes.

His throat was torn to pieces. The Word tore its way through flesh, as if it were being said by the originators of the language and their unique voice box. Sounds and nuances Harry had never heard spilled into his mouth, his tongue working furiously to pronounce them. At one point, his teeth came crashing down and gouged into the sensitive flesh, creating passages of blood and gore to allow the sounds to escape. His breath built up in his chest- the creatures had two hearts, he suddenly realised, and one would stop beating when they began to talk- and it felt like his lungs were going to explode from the strain. Finally, after what seemed like hours but was merely another second, Harry pushed the Word out of his mouth. The world around him stilled for a split second, as if all the noise in it had halted to watch what was about to happen. Then, the Word resounded through the air, as if Harry had screamed it through a microphone. It wasn’t as impressive as what Harry had seen Dumbledore use at the

Ministry of Magic, but it did the job. The Word spread out around him in an ever-expanding arc of rippling air.

The rippling dome of noise shot out and passed through the tiger-like Denarian. It crashed down in a heap almost instantly as the Word worked its effects on its body. At the same time, Verrine slumped over, the energy she was holding in her palm fading away into nothingness as she lost consciousness. The wave continued past the two Denarians, seemingly unaffected by the tattered shroud of darkness that surrounded them, and Harry could distantly feel it striking at the other tenants in the building. As Verrine lost consciousness, the shroud shimmered and melted away to reveal a devastated hallway. The floors were cracked, much of it simply gone to reveal the level beneath, while several of the walls had been knocked down. Harry smiled in triumph as Meciél let go of the odd perception and the weird buzzing at the back of his head disappeared. He continued smiling, even when the blood began to dribble from his nose and mouth. As he stood up, Meciél using her unique influence over his body to regenerate his wounds, he gagged and let out a loud, hacking cough. When he removed his hand, it was covered in droplets of blood and his chest was burning painfully. He opened his mouth to speak and agonising pain shot through him. It felt like his throat had been torn to pieces and Harry wasn't surprised when Meciél said that it was.

"Perhaps using a Word so soon was hasty," Meciél concluded, her illusion appearing before him.

Harry couldn't speak, but the look of annoyance and his rolling eyes conveyed exactly what he thought of Meciél's deductions.

"I must admit though, it was a moderate success," Meciél said airily, bending down and inspecting Harry's face with gentle hands. "Your throat has been torn to shreds and you have three brain aneurisms, but it did work quite well on our enemies."

Harry rolled his eyes, although he carefully felt his head. He did have a bit of a headache, sure, but a brain aneurism?

As the sound of police sirens quickly filled the air, Harry dropped his hand and made a low growling noise in the back of his throat, something that quickly had him in a fit of coughs. He didn't know what was more unpleasant, Meciél's attempts at healing his shattered throat or the actual pain of the injury (which Meciél was doing her best to suppress alongside the healing of his body).

It was a good thing that he was a Denarian to a powerful Fallen, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to modify over twenty memories in a few short minutes, although one of the tenants, a skinny, gaunt man with syringe marks lining his arm, may have been obliterated a little too well and just flopped about uselessly and drooled with a vacant expression after Harry was done with him.

He levitated and banished Verrine and the other Denarian, who had transformed into a large, muscular brute of a man with more hair than the average dog, then closed and charmed his door as the police came storming up onto his floor.

It was over two hours later when the police presence began to dwindle. The charms that Harry had placed over his door and ruined wall kept him from being bothered (all they saw was a boarded up doorway with 'Unsafe Living Conditions' printed on it) but he could hear them interviewing the other tenants and grinned as they became more and more confused. His memory charms hadn't been as good as the professionals, and several of them had conflicting stories. One was convinced that there had been a gang fight, while another claimed that it was a bar fight- despite the actual lack of any type of alcohol establishments. There had been a couple who swore that it was some kind of drag race and one who even went so far as to say that a tiger had escaped from the zoo and was working with a giant ant! Alright, so perhaps Harry had missed one in his haste. It didn't really matter, anyway.

He took a sip of his water and absently gazed from the grimy window to the centre of his very bare living room, apart from the pile of rotten wood and crumbled mortar. Slumped in the middle of the room were Verrine and the large man. They were trapped and chained by dozens of charms and curses, still unconscious. It would only take a few castings of enervate to wake them up, as Harry had found out, so

in all honesty the Word probably wasn't as powerful as Harry had thought. Still, it had done the job quite well with only the minor side effect of ripping his insides apart. Harry's eyes flickered to Verrine and her topless state and he couldn't help a lecherous grin that crossed his face. Say what you want about her, she was stacked pretty well. It was a pity that he was going to have to kill her, really. He massaged his throat as he stood up and strode over to her. It still felt a little tender but had healed quite nicely.

"Enervate!" he murmured hoarsely.

Verrine's face grimaced in her sleep as she stirred, but her eyes remained closed. Harry rolled his eyes, wondering if he should attempt to revive the other man. Considering his state, Harry would bet his considerably small savings that the Denarian was one of the nut jobs and he really didn't want to deal with one of them at the moment. He glanced over at the man, just in case, and frowned when he saw something beneath his long, wild hair and scruffy beard. His eyes widened as he took in a genuine honest-to-God dog collar, a pink collar at that, and sniggered.

"Verrine, you dominatrix," he croaked.

Verrine didn't stir. Harry frowned and bent down, his face twisting into a leer. He reached out and gave one of her breasts a squeeze, unable to keep the smirk off his face. Verrine didn't move an inch and her eyes remained shut. Harry frowned and squeezed the soft mound of flesh harder.

"Are you having fun?" Meciél's voice rang out from behind him.

Harry nodded enthusiastically and turned his head, only to get an eyeful of Meciél's own cleavage as she stood before him in incredibly sheer robes of white that clung to her form. Her silver eyes danced with amusement as she raised her hands to her own breasts and Harry's eyes widened, his grip slackening as he licked his lips. Meciél merely smiled and began to pull apart her robes. Harry began to grin, but it quickly became a scowl as Meciél's illusion disappeared before anything could really be seen.

“Damn,” muttered Harry, his voice still weak. “You know, I don’t mean to be sexist and all, but it’s women like you that allow rapists to use the phrase ‘she was asking for it’ in court and win.”

‘Now that I have your attention, perhaps you can wake Verrine up before you get anymore distracted by her breasts,’ Meciell said blandly. ‘Which, for the record, lack the perfection of my own.’

“You’re just jealous,” Harry muttered with a scowl, standing up.

He took another sip of his water and then held the glass out above Verrine’s slack form. Without any warning, he let go and it promptly smashed apart on her face, drenching her pale skin in cold water and shards of glass. Verrine’s face winced and she couldn’t stop the gasp of shock that left her, her light-blue eyes flickering open to glare up at him.

“Oh, you’re awake,” Harry said neutrally.

Verrine narrowed her eyes, and then took a deep breath. Staggering to her knees, a feat Harry found impressive considering that there was a charm on her that made her weight six times as much as she usually did, Verrine took one look at Harry and, to his astonishment, bowed her head.

“Master,” she said solemnly. “I served you long ago. Now that I have seen your power, I have come to serve you once more.”

“Kinky,” Harry said, blinking in surprise. He cocked his head and stared at her. “But I think I’d remember if I ever had an ugly women like you in a dog collar before.”

Verrine’s face twitched at his insult but she remained still and silent.

“What? Are you serious?” Harry demanded after a moment. He broke off to cough, summoning another glass from the kitchen and filling it with water with a tap of his wand. After a sip, he continued. “You just tried to kill me and now you’re calling me master? Fuck, BDSM has really gone hardcore lately.”

"I was not trying to kill you," Verrine said quietly. "I was testing your strength. Once, long ago, I served you faithfully and loyally at the height of your power. Yet, you fell and your power was broken. Now that you've returned, I've come to serve you again, but only if your power had been restored. If I could defeat you, then you had no right to command my loyalty."

"What?" Harry demanded a moment later, looking mystified. "Hang on...I don't get this."

"She is, in simple terms, a lackey," Meciél said smoothly, her illusion appearing before him. The beautiful Fallen circled Verrine like a predator, her intent silver eyes taking in everything she could. "She is drawn to the one with the most power. She always has been. Once, it was me. Then, she became Vesper's tool. Now that her former master is dead at my hand, she's here to crawl back to me, as if I would not forget her betrayal!"

"C'mon! She's faking it!" Harry protested. He raised his wand and sparks crackled at the tip, making Verrine flinch. "Let me prove it, Meciél!"

"So it's true," Verrine murmured, her eyes widening. "Your host remains independent of your will. That's very unlike you. If I remember properly, you usually snap their weak little minds the first chance you get."

"Crucio!" Harry spat.

Verrine dissolved into a fit of screams as she thrashed and flailed on the floor. Harry watched with an annoyed frown while Meciél's face remained impassive as they both watched the defeated Denarian arch her back in agony. Harry broke off the curse with a casual flick.

"Tell me the truth, you bitch," he snapped. "If you don't, I'll do that again- for twice as long!"

"No!" Verrine gasped, her body heaving and doing very nice things in her topless state. "I'm...telling you the truth. I knew that..."

“Crucio!”

Harry held the curse for twice as long before he lifted it. Verrine’s body wouldn’t stop shivering, her mouth opening and closing wordlessly as tears leaked from the corner of her eyes. Harry would have mocked her for crying, but he remembered when he had been placed under this curse and, frankly, he didn’t blame her.

“That...was the most agonising thing...I have ever felt,” Verrine managed to gasp. Specks of spittle and drool were dripping from her mouth. “I know the...truth. You’ve...regained great... power. It’s...enough to enact another purge. I...want to live...through the Second Purge of the Renegade! That’s...why I’m here!”

“Purge?” Harry repeated, puzzled.

“I do not take betrayal lightly,” Meciél said quietly. “When I was deposed, it was on the blood of many others. Very few survived it and it took them centuries to regain new hosts. It was one of the few times when the Blackened Order of the Denarius was completely and utterly broken.”

“I don’t want to die, Meciél,” Verrine said quietly, having regained some semblance of control, although her leg wouldn’t stop twitching. “My host is beautiful and strong and the world is becoming a very interesting place to live. You’ve killed Nicodemus and Vesper, two of the few who survived the First Purge. You’ll go after the others. I don’t want to be one of them. There are those who think they might weather your storm. I know you, and I know that’s not true. This has been a long-time coming and you won’t stop.”

“Self-preservation, cowardice, begging for your life,” Harry mused. “I can understand those motives.” He paused. “Not that I’ve needed them. I’m not an ugly, cowardly bitch like you.”

Verrine twitched and her eyes grew angry.

“You have something to say?” Harry asked her with a vicious grin.

Verrine hesitated and shook her head, her hair swaying across her breasts.

“Good,” Harry said firmly, his eyes drawn to her parts. He sighed. “Ah, man. Here I am, with a half-naked woman on her knees before me, and it’s got absolutely nothing to do with sex. It’s not fair.”

“Verrine, Verrine, Verrine,” Meciell tutted, her illusion stroking the other Denarian on the cheek with the back of her hand. Verrine remained oblivious to Meciell’s imaginary ministrations. “You truly do never change, do you? This is very nostalgic.”

“Still say we kill her,” Harry said tightly.

“I thought you might be upset,” Verrine told him quietly. “I remember you and your temperament. That’s why I came with a gift, of sorts, to prove my loyalty to you.”

“Is it silk sheets?” Harry asked, and rolled his eyes when Verrine looked confused. “Never mind. What is it then? Gold? Money? Booze? Drugs? Swedish Prostitutes?”

“Rosanna,” Verrine answered quietly. “I bring you Rosanna.”

Meciell’s illusion abruptly stiffened and Harry winced as a flash of utter hatred rushed through his mind. He held a hand to his head, grimacing, while Meciell stared at Verrine with eyes that suddenly looked as if they were on fire.

“Rosanna? Isn’t she a Denarian?” Harry asked in confusion. He had the feeling he was somehow out of the loop on something.

“Consider it, Meciell,” Verrine said quietly from on her knees. “I can give you Rosanna, one of the three still left alive that escaped your purge. Rosanna, the loyal lapdog of Lartessa, Rosanna, the one who plotted your downfall and committed the grievous of sins against you...”

“Stop.”

Harry's voice cracked through the room, a dual-blend of his own snippy tone and a heavily-layered feminine tone wrought with a palatable fury. Harry looked surprised, massing his already-sore throat. It had been a long time since Meciél had spoken through him like that.

"Keep talking," Harry said quietly, his face not revealing his attempts to speak to Meciél within his mind.

The Fallen was being curiously silent and Harry could feel her contemplating something. Harry shrugged, keeping an ear on Verrine as she spoke.

"Rosanna is inspecting one of Lartessa's lesser known properties," Verrine was saying. "The Blackened Order has decreed that you are to be found and killed as soon as possible. The death of Nicodemus made them uneasy, even as it opened up new possibilities, but the death of Vesper has shown them that you are intent in pursuing your revenge. Rosanna has been sent from Europe to oversee the mobilisation of the Blackened Order's resources. I can give you where she'll be, who'll she be with, the layout of the location and the timeframe on which you have to do this."

"Uh huh," Harry said unconvincingly. "You'll just give us that, free of charge."

"Well, I had been hoping that you might be more inclined to spare my life," Verrine sniped, showing some expression for once and looking annoyed.

"That's your story, then, but what about him?" Harry said, jerking his thumb at the still-unconscious man.

Verrine shrugged.

"A beast, nothing more," she answered. "I've trained him for over a decade as my own personal attack 'dog'. He is yours to command."

"Right," Harry muttered. He scratched his head, regarding her carefully. She was acting too calm, too in control for his liking. "Still..."

"My information is only good for a certain amount of time. She will only be there until around two or so in the morning," Verrine told him as he took another sip of his water, savouring the cool liquid. "Rosanna is making the visit early this morning. It's one of several but it's the only one I know of. You need to decide if you want to use my knowledge quickly, or else it'll be worthless."

'Meciel?'

'I am considering it,' Meciel answered. 'On the one hand, Verrine's actions merely confirm what I already knew about her. This is exactly the type of cowardice and treason Verrine would use to secure her place on the winning side. On the other hand, I cannot rule out the possibility that she is lying.'

'Some good old 'Crucio' could bring it out of her,' Harry offered, twirling his wand in his fingers and glaring down at the impassive woman before him.

'We would not get what we needed to know in time,' Meciel said.

'If she's telling the truth,' Harry supplied darkly.

'Indeed.'

"What's to say that this isn't a trap?" Harry asked Verrine, while Meciel thought it over.

"I would go with you, under whatever spell you want to put on me," Verrine said quietly. "If there's a trap, I have no doubt that you'll be able to kill me before it's been fully sprung. Also, if it makes any difference, I give you my word."

"The word of a traitor? How reassuring," Harry said blandly. He finished his glass of water and slumped against a seat. "Meciel's thinking about it. I'm personally hoping she'll say no."

"You're very bloodthirsty," Verrine noted. "And you do the intimidation act quite well."

"I practise in the mirror," Harry explained. "Not that you'd be able to relate, what, with your mirrors cracking every time you stand in front of them."

"Are you calling me ugly?" Verrine asked, and she sounded annoyed.

"No, no," Harry disagreed sincerely. He smirked. "I'm calling you hideous. I've seen boils of a Troll's arse that looked better than you."

"I'll have you know that I've always been complimented on the choice of beautiful hosts," Verrine said tightly. "This one is no exception."

"Ah," Harry said in understanding. He reached forward and patted Verrine on the head, a sympathetic expression on his face. "I'm sure they were just trying to make you feel better, hag."

Verrine curled her lip and leaned back with a huff. Harry had the feeling she would have crossed her arms in a huff, if her arms hadn't been bound and her legs hadn't been magically-glued to the ground.

'I have made a decision,' Meciél said quietly and Harry straightened, paying close attention. 'I believe that there is a strong chance that Verrine is telling us the truth. If that's so, then a chance to find and kill Rosanna is something I cannot pass up. We will use her information, find Rosanna and make her suffer for what she did to me.'

'You sure?' Harry thought sceptically.

Meciél was silent.

"They must have really done something to piss you off," Harry muttered under his breath. He suddenly felt irritable and scowled at Verrine furiously. "Fine. We'll check out your information. But, if it's wrong and you're lying to me..." Harry leaned forward and stared into Verrine's blue eyes. "Then I am going to burn you alive, and there's nothing anybody will be able to do to stop me."

"I understand, milord," Verrine said submissively.

Harry paused.

“What?” he asked.

“I said I understand, milord,” Verrine repeated.

Harry stroked his chin imperiously and nodded sagely to himself. A smile was flickering on his face as he practically preened himself before her.

“Say that again,” he demanded.

“I understand, milord,” Verrine repeated obediently.

“Ooh,” Harry whistled. “Milord. I like the sound of that. Lord Harry. No, Lord Harold. Lord Harold the Great. Lord Harold the Unmerciful. Lord Harold the Conqueror. Lord Harold the...Lord.”

“What do I do now, milord?” Verrine asked, still bound before him.

“If I said ‘curl up and die’, would you listen?” Harry asked lightly.

“Probably not,” Verrine admitted.

“That’s a shame,” Harry muttered, He strode to the kitchen and casually threw the cup to the sink. “Well, you can stay there for a few hours and mull over your ‘loyalty’ to me while I go and get some sleep, since it looks like I’ll need it. Afterwards, I might have something to eat while you clean up all the crap you blew up.”

“To be fair, a lot of that destruction is yours,” Verrine said, displeasure flickering on her face.

“Hey, I’m the Lord and you’re the serf,” Harry snapped. “Stop trying to develop literacy and start trawling my fields!”

Verrine looked confused as Harry stalked to the bedroom, only pausing to reinforce a series of very nasty curses on the perimeter of the living room (and a few on the door to his room should Verrine somehow escape). If Verrine moved more than a few centimetres

from where she was, she would really regret it, especially since most of the curses Harry was using had been specifically designed to ensure the victim's survival despite the gruesome wounds they inflicted. Just after Harry entered his bedroom, he paused and poked his head back out.

"You know, if I had been a woman that sentence would have been so hot," he drawled.

"Milord?"

"You know, trawling the fields," Harry said and snickered.

Verrine looked at him blankly.

"You'd make a horrible lesbian," Harry snapped and slammed his door shut.

"Thanks?" Verrine offered to his retreating back. She sighed and glanced around the room, noticing the runes carved into the walls and sensing the powerful ambient magic around her. "I suppose that could have gone a little better," she admitted to herself and tried to make herself comfortable.

In the bedroom, Harry lay back on his bed and watched Verrine through the wall, which offered a hazy, transparent view of the living room. Meciel's illusion appeared beside him.

"I suppose you're not actually going to sleep?" she asked.

"Hell no," Harry snorted, never taking his eyes off Verrine. "I'm all for you getting your revenge, but this seems a little rushed to me."

"Don't worry," Meciel said and ran a hand through his hair, a beautiful smile on her face. "I have the utmost confidence in your abilities."

"Including my sexual prowess?" Harry asked with a raised eyebrow.

Meciel stared at him with a slight smile.

“Hey, I’ve seen naked breasts today,” Harry defended weakly. “You can’t blame me for feeling a bit excited.”

Meciel’s illusion disappeared around the same time as Harry’s smile and he turned back to the wall, idly twirling his wand in his hand as he watched his newest servant attempt to shift to her side. Despite how cliché the line was, he really did have a bad feeling about this.

A/N: Thanks to DLP for the spell-check and for pointing out some glaring plot-holes. I've fixed them up and altered them so they make more sense. I have an assignment due in on Thursday, a test next week and two exams coming up, and when I'm not doing work I find that I can't be bothered writing. That said, I'll try to get the next chapter up quickly, since it does leave you with a bit of a cliffhanger here.

"Why is it that all my enemies have way cooler houses than I do?" Harry muttered sourly.

It was early in the morning, the stars twinkling in the clear night sky. Harry and Verrine were crouched in a small bush on the other side of a desolate road, staring up at one of the Denarian's safe house. When Verrine had mentioned a safe house, Harry had gotten the impression of a small, lacklustre place, drab and easy to overlook. That was the point of a safe house, after all, to direct attention away from it and its participants. What he was staring at, however, could only be described as a four-story mansion.

"I believe it's because you're...what's the proper term? Ah, yes. Stingy," Verrine concluded quietly as she stood beside the Denarian Knight at stared up at the mansion. She glanced at Harry from the corner of her eye and added a hasty "Milord."

Harry took his eyes off the long stretch of green lawns, absently deciding that the fountain in the middle of the driveway would be good cover if they were detected, and swung an annoyed gaze to his dark-haired companion.

"I'm sorry, milord," Verrine said humbly, bowing her head. "I spoke out of turn."

"Yeah, you did," Harry said darkly. "Besides, anybody who dresses like you can't really criticise anybody else about being cheap."

Verrine stiffened as Harry allowed a glimmer of a smile to cross his face. It hadn't taken him long to discover that Verrine had taken to the emotion 'vanity' quite well during her exile and, naturally, Harry had immediately jumped on Verrine's sore spot and drilled into it as best

he could. He found it amusing to toy with people like that, especially since there were only a handful of people whose skin he couldn't get under- Dumbledore and the Knights were the first to spring to mind.

"I don't understand," Verrine said a touch coldly. Her hands brushed up and down her silk blouse, idly toying with a button near her cleavage and allowing Harry glimpses of some pretty racy black lingerie. "This is the best that Europe has to offer. It cost me quite a lot of money."

"Really? You got ripped off that badly?" Harry said and chuckled, scratching the back of his head. "I guess its fine. I mean, it does the job, even if it is a few years out of fashion. Besides, it kinda suits you...the stains really bring out your sallow skin."

Verrine eyed Harry dangerously.

"Now back to business," Harry said cheerfully, ignoring her mood, and he rubbed his hands together, his smile fading. 'Business, by the way, that I'm totally against,' he mentally added.

'How odd,' Meciél said blandly. 'Usually you're so very eager to get into the thick of things, my flame singing in your veins as you unleash your powers upon those who have dared defy your will.'

'That's a nice bit of sucking up. Anymore like that and I'll have to undo my fly,' Harry thought dryly as he and Verrine began to move up to the mansion, avoiding the several patrolling guards. 'I'm not against fighting. That'd be the same as being against having sex, completely uncool in my opinion. I just think we should take Verrine out back and put her out of her misery.'

'You don't trust her,' Meciél said approvingly. 'Good.'

'Tell you what,' Harry thought snippily. 'Twenty bucks and a flash of your breasts says that this is a trap.'

'Very well,' Meciél said in amusement, and Harry got the impression that she was smiling like a Cheshire cat. 'I accept your wager.'

However, I'll bet you a 'flash of my breasts' that you survive and kill whoever stands in your way.'

"Ah, you know me too well." Harry scowled. "And I won't get to see your breasts regardless."

"What?" Verrine asked cautiously as they both ducked behind the fountain in the mansion yard.

"Nothing," Harry muttered. "I was just making comments on your saggy breasts. Seriously, get a push up bra or something. Nobody wants to see granny tits."

Verrine's face contorted in anger, her mask of stoic calm disappearing as she narrowed her eyes. She looked like she was about to retort furiously, when her eyes widened and she whirled around. Harry was quicker however, his wand flicking up instinctively and 'Effodio!' rolling off his tongue. There was a flash of silver light and a crack akin to a backfiring car. The guard, who had been approaching them with some kind of automatic weapon raised, didn't even get a chance to scream before the silver light pulverized his skull into gory bits and sent his corpse flailing backwards.

"Oops," Harry said sheepishly as shouts burst out from all around them. A siren began to blare as Verrine dispatched the guard's partner, a slither of earth shooting up into her hand in the form of a jagged spike, which promptly ended up in the man's heart. "I suppose I might have jumped the gun there."

"No wonder you're horrible in bed," Verrine snapped as gunfire blasted at them.

Harry's eyes widened even as he raised a gleaming dome of defensive magic to surround him, crimson and dark hues blending nicely in the shadows until a spotlight (although Harry had to wonder where the hell they had got one from seemingly out of nowhere) centered on them.

"Who told you that?" Harry hissed furiously as Verrine made an odd gesture with her hands.

He was dimly aware of the ground rumbling and cracking, a group of guards yelling in surprise and fear even as their jeep was slowly swallowed up by the quicksand that had opened beneath them.

“Just a rumor,” Verrine shrugged idly, smiling at Harry coolly.

“Who’s been-“Harry halted and wings of bone sprung from the back of his body, impaling a pair of snarling, drooling dogs as they leapt for his throat.

Harry hurled one to the side, throwing it through the mansion window even as security guards, dressed in uniforms and all, poured from the doors. Harry would have sniffed at the typical-look of the shopping centre security uniform if it weren’t for the large, gleaming guns they were holding.

“Fuck,” Harry growled as he brought his wing over and ended the whimpering dog’s life with a blast of flame from his wand. He hurled the sizzling carcass aside and reflexively ducked as two dozen men with automatic weapons opened fire on his position. “I could sure use a tank right about now.”

“Are your spells not sufficient enough for this task?” Verrine asked with an arched eyebrow.

Of course they are!” Harry snapped. “But it’d be more authentic and way cooler.”

“Cooler?” Verrine asked, flicking her hand and sending a blinding needle of energy at a pair of guards who were trying to flank. The spell tore through the armour of the first and blood sprayed from his screaming mouth as he collapsed. Harry idly dispatched the second guard, who was attempting to drag his partner to safety, and turned back to Verrine.

“Yeah, cooler,” Harry said. He grinned. “What’s the point of doing something if you’re not going to do it with a bit of a bang?”

As soon as he had finished, his wand flashed with Hellfire and Verrine wrinkled her nose in disgust as the heavy scent of sulphur filled the air. Harry winked at Verrine as fire exploded from the tip of his wand. The brightly glowing flames, too bright to be natural, twisted and thrashed even as it took the shape of two-legged bone-wrym, complete with wings and a tail. The Fiendfyre, twice as tall as a man, glided forward as the fiery wrym opened its mouth and let out a devastating screech. Perhaps it was a remnant of the creature that Harry used to be able to transform into, or perhaps it was the Fiendfyre's own curse screaming out its everlasting desire to consume, but the bellowing sound froze many of the guards on the spot, their faces absolutely petrified at the monstrosity they were facing. A few attempted to fire at it but they were swept aside in a blaze of searing heat as the bone-wrym crashed against the enemies defensive position and shattered it with a single blow.

"See?" Harry said triumphantly, pointing at the Fiendfyre as it tore through a parked jeep. "That's bang."

Verrine sniffed, holding a handkerchief up to her nose, and Harry rolled his eyes at her display of snobbery. It wasn't like the other Fallen would be unfamiliar to the smell of Hellfire. If she was anything like Meciél, then she should revel in it. As if reading his thoughts, Verrine spoke up.

"Hellfire smells quite different where I am," she told him coldly, neatly folding her handkerchief- embodied silk, of course, and placing it back in her pocket. "If I may suggest, you might want to go and intercept Rosanna before she can get away. We didn't come here to toy with these pathetic mortals, after all."

"Ah, right," Harry uttered. He frowned. "Stay here and kill these idiots. Don't come after me, because, frankly, I still don't trust you and I might accidentally kill you if you surprise me."

"You say the nicest things." Verrine's sarcasm was apparent, and Harry barely heard her muttered comment. "No wonder you can't hold a girlfriend. Lousy manners, lousy in the sack..."

“What?” He snapped, whirling around and glaring at Verrine furiously. “Okay, seriously, who the hell said that?”

“Rosanna?” Verrine prompted, and lifted a slender arm to point towards the mansion. “Go and get her before she can tell anybody else.

“I’ll beat you,” Harry promised darkly. “I’m a woman beater, you know. I beat up Vesper, I beat up...” He trailed off and sighed. “This aint over,” he muttered sourly and jumped over the fountain, his wand spewing a hail of green death.

Verrine’s lips twitched and she muttered something under her breath. A hand of stone burst from the ground, showering the guards with tiny stone, and it lurched forward to grab one of the scattered guards, squeezing him with incredible strength until even Harry could hear the bones cracking. Verrine smiled mildly and brushed some imaginary dust off her shoulder as the hand collapsed into a pile of rubble, then stared at Harry’s retreating back with an unfathomable gaze.

The large doors of the mansion buckled and broke apart as a searing wave of cursed flame washed in over the gleaming marble floor. Several guards, their faces hidden behind some quite advanced-looking body armor, opened fire at the unnatural flames with the type of dogged perseverance only found in the indoctrinated. The fire reared up as bullets slapped into it, the very metal of the projectiles hissing and melting, and lashed out at the main barricade inside, an overturned table with several guards and some kind of heavy weapon bolted to the ground. The barricade disappeared underneath a blazing tide of brightly flickering flame as the rest of the guards scattered, the sound of gunfire booming loudly in the oddly desolate mansion.

Harry strolled through the doorway and his expression might have been mistaken for boredom if it weren’t for his eyes, which were constantly darting from side to side, as if he was expecting a trap to come down upon him at any minute- which he was. A couple of the fleeing guards were brave enough to confront him with a hail of gunfire. Sparks of light flickered around Harry and the defensive magic shimmered with pale light as the bullets shattered upon the

spell uselessly. Harry spared them a glance and scowled, his wand rising. The cursed flame, which lay on the ground like a brightly burning carpet, leapt up on his command, spiraling up into a gigantic column of fire that, for a moment, vaguely resembled a serpent. Fiery fangs came down on the two men and literally vaporised them.

As the fiendfyre receded with a shower of thick smoke and bringing with it the none-too-tantalizing smell of burnt human flesh, Harry glanced around, ignoring the few smoking bodies that still had some semblance of proper form. He clutched Hellfire tightly in his mind, blazing heat coiling around his perceptions and thoughts and almost begging to be released in waves of destructive power. One of his gloved hands clutched his wand, the other hung by his waist where he had strapped the Sword of the Cross to his belt. The holy relic remained silent, which seemed to be the case more and more often these days.

“Fucking hell,” Harry muttered.

He felt entirely too tense for his liking, the normal enjoyment he got out of his fights dimmed by the apprehension that he was walking into an ambush. Once, maybe, he might have swaggered in confidently, all bluster and gung-ho, but he liked to think that he’d gotten a little perspective, and the coolness of shooting fire at people was outweighed by his experience of just how powerful his enemies could be.

Suddenly, a scratching noise from behind him hit his ears. Harry sidestepped, ducked and whirled around simultaneously, the defensive magics around him solidifying into a column of hardened azure light on a single thought. A flash of silver light blasted from his wand, a powerful Effodio streaking forward as a guard staggered up from the ground. The guard, a slightly-overweight man in his forties, screamed in agony as the powerful spell impacted on his elbow and literally tore it apart. Blood splattered and dribbled and Harry whipped his head to the side in a great display of reflexes as something pink and lumpy flew past him.

“No...please...” the man mumbled as he dropped to his knees.

Harry watched with slight interest as the man begged for his life. His eyes seemed to be more focused and alert than any of the other guards that Harry had seen. Perhaps the shock and trauma of the spell had snapped him out of whatever mind control the Denarians had him under?

"Please...I have...family," the man was gasping, blood trickling from his mouth as he clutched the stump that had once been his right arm. He gazed up at Harry with horrified eyes as the Denarian Knight considered it.

Without warning, a long, slender wing of sharpened bone slid out of his back, easily sliding through the thin slits in his jacket without tearing the material. The man gaped and managed a terrified scream as the wing lanced down and speared him through his shoulder. Without any effort on Harry's part at all, Harry lifted him up and carelessly threw him to other side of the room. The man was still screaming as he crashed through a window, glass shattering on the impact, and thrown out to the front lawns, disappearing from Harry's sight.

'Harry Potter, the merciful,' Meciél mused. 'I must admit, it doesn't have quite the ring as 'Harry Potter, the butcher.'

"Ah, well, I guess I'm just a sucker for the 'I've got a family' bit," Harry said lazily, idly sweeping his one wing forward and stabbing it through the throat of a gurgling guard, who had been slowly pushing his battered body across the floor for his weapon.

'I wasn't being entirely serious,' Meciél said snidely. 'I sincerely doubt that he will live through the night.'

"He'll be fine," Harry drawled with shrug, even as he whipped his wand through the air and directed the ever-increasing Fiendfyre to the few wounded guards who remained alive, ending their lives with a blast of searing flame before extinguishing the cursed fire in an impressive display of mental fortitude. "The wound was mostly cauterized by that much dark magic and that stab wasn't that bad."

‘Oh, no, it’s not his wounds that will kill him,’ Meciél said in amusement. ‘You just seem to have forgotten that Verrine is still outside...’

Meciél was cut off by a loud, piercing scream that drowned out the scattered gunfire and explosions from the front lawn. Harry sighed and exhaled noisily.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said lightly. “Laugh it up, smug, know-it-all bitch.”

‘Indeed I am,’ Meciél said a tad smugly.

Harry just rolled his eyes and continued to stalk through the house, the faint smile dropping from his face as he grew more serious. Rosanna was meant to be in here somewhere, and while Meciél was confident that the other Denarian wasn’t nearly as powerful as Harry, her didn’t want to take any chances. As he turned a corner, moving away from the debris-scattered entrance hall, he paused. There was somebody standing before him.

It was a cloaked wizard, blue eyes glittering from behind a dark hood as he stroked a long, slender and intricately carved staff in his arms. The cloak fluttered and flapped behind him, as if there was an invisible breeze pushing at it, and at first Harry thought it was nothing more than a trick, a little display of magic to push up the intimidation. Then, he noticed that there really was a breeze flowing from the next room and shook his head with a sigh.

“Piss off, Gandalf,” Harry warned. “You’re a tad overmatched here.”

“I can’t let you harm my Mistress,” the wizard intoned in a surprisingly deep voice. Harry caught a glimpse of a heavily scarred face beneath the hood, the other man’s expression serene rather than angry. “Please leave, or we will have to fight.”

“We’ll have to fight? Oh no! How horrible! What am I going to do?” Harry exclaimed, his hands flying up to cover his mouth theatrically even as his mocking tone rang through the halls. He stopped and snapped his fingers as if something had just occurred to him. “Oh, wait, that’s right, I like fighting. Avada Kedavra!”

The wizard raised his staff, the runes on his cloak glowing with power, and a landscape painting from the wall was tugged away. It soared through the air and the green streak of light slammed into it. Harry watched as it exploded in green flame, the momentum pushing it to the other side of the hall.

“Don’t doubt my resolve,” the true-wizard said evenly. “I have protected my Mistress since I was a small child. It was she who took me off the streets and granted me this power to protect her. She took me from nothing and gave me everything. I am her tool, her weapon, and she may use me as she sees fit...”

Harry took the time to roll his eyes as the Wizard continued his little monologue, his voice rising with passion.

“Ever since my father was murdered, I have needed nobody else save for her! She helped me take revenge upon them, although I’ll admit that I spared them in the end- my father was as wicked as they and truly deserved his fate. My mother fell to his evil, her innocence ended with blood-stained hands as she threw away her soul for him, all for the name of love and...”

The wizard stopped, a pained gasp escaping his mouth as the staff in his hands shattered in a shower of splintered wood. Harry stood before him, the Sword of the Cross glowing ominously as it protruded from the true-wizard’s stomach, looking annoyed and irritated.

“What the hell are you doing?” Harry demanded. “Did you think that you could tell a stupid sob-story and the battle will just stop? C’mon, only the important people can do monologues and, well, you’re clearly not important enough.”

Harry yanked the blade out of the man’s chest and sheathed it to the strap at his waist. The true-wizard stared at him with wide eyes, then collapsed and fell to the ground, as dead as his story. Harry glanced at the corpse with derision then continued on forward.

The next few minutes were silent as Harry continued to prowl around the house. The sounds of battle outside were beginning to abate and

Harry was growing more and more annoyed. He had suspected a trap of some kind, but Rosanna hadn't even showed her face yet. Huh, maybe Verrine wasn't trying to betray him after all and Rosanna had run away? Harry heaved a sigh as he jumped down a flight of stairs and then stopped in surprise. In the middle of the room adjacent the staircase stood Rosanna as she crouched above something in the floor. Harry caught a glimpse of braided dark hair before the woman was suddenly gone, jumping down and disappearing through the trap door.

A sudden surge of hatred battered against Harry's mind as Meciél caught sight of the woman and he winced, Meciél's presence seemingly swelling against his head in a maelstrom of Hellfire and a loathing that Harry had only ever witnessed against two others- Nicodemus and Vesper. He took a staggered step forward as one hand pushed against his forehead, his veins singing with bloodlust and crying out for revenge. He managed to halt himself by grinding his feet into the ground and a moment later, the powerful pressure against this mind suddenly departed. Harry let out a huge breath of relief.

"Yikes," he muttered, shaking his head dazedly. "It's that time of the month already? Time must fly when you're bleeding out of your uterus."

'Rosanna,' Meciél whispered coldly and Harry cocked his head. It was almost as if Meciél sounded contrite or abashed at her outburst.

He wisely decided to close the topic and cautiously approached the dark hole in the floor, his eyes darting around furtively. It was true that magic could shield him from a great many things, and Meciél's regenerative skills could literally repair his major organs, but any fatal damage to his brain would have him dead as any other human. Then again, if anybody had been there they'd have had a small chance to kill him during Meciél's little mental escapade.

"So," Harry said dryly, coming to a stop before the hole and staring down into it. He couldn't see anything. "It is a trap, or a trap?"

'It could be an escape tunnel of some kind,' Meciél suggested, her voice regaining her familiar light-heartedness.

Harry looked down at the hole in the ground flatly and Meciél sighed.

'Well, yes, it's probably a trap,' she concluded.

"Wanna go back and kill Verrine?" Harry offered, scratching his head with his free hand and debating the pros and cons of following Rosanna down the long and scary shaft.

'Well, we really don't know that she's betrayed us,' Meciél mused.

Harry rolled his eyes and scowled. "Do you have to play the devil's advocate every time I say something? Can't you just admit that I might be onto things the first time around?"

'Now my beloved, tell me, where would the fun be in that?' Meciél teased.

Harry stared at the hole and took a deep breath.

"Do we spring the trap?" He murmured thoughtfully. "Or do we find another way around?"

'We need to move quickly,' Meciél pressed urgently.

Harry caught a flash of emotion beneath her forced calm, an eagerness for death that always sent his blood tingling. Still, his bloodlust was warring with his common sense. While Harry was usually the first to jump into dangerous battle situations, even he found the idea of jumping down a shaft, which could lead to a pool of lava for all he knew, a little hasty.

"Well..." he hesitated.

'Whatever you're going to do, I suggest that you do it quickly!' Meciél snapped at him.

“Yeah, yeah, alright,” Harry muttered, running a hand through his hair. “Geez. You get pushy when you’re pissed off. All I’m saying is...”

Harry never got the chance to finish his sentence or make his final decision as suddenly, and from seemingly out of nowhere, the ground cracked. He reflexively looked down, his eyes starting to widen with shock, before the tiled ground cracked and crumbled beneath his feet, sending him tumbling down to the darkness without any warning.

As soon as Harry began to plummet down the shaft, he tucked in his arms and concentrated. Air whipped up at his face as he was literally enveloped in a column of azure light, which grew darker until it was almost seemed like a tangible solid. The battering of air against his face stopped and suddenly everything was very quiet. His spell cast, Harry focused his eyes down on square patch of dim light at the end of the drop, reflexively flinching when the shield surrounding him slammed into a rocky ledge, causing uncomfortable tremors to run through him. A moment later, some of the debris from the collapsing floor caught up with him and crumbled to dust as the defensive magic ripped through it.

“Shit!” Harry swore loudly, a scowl crossing his face. His voice rose as he called out to the darkness. “You know, I was probably gonna jump anyway. You didn’t have to throw me down a fucking pit!”

‘We’re almost there,’ commented Meciél, and Harry noticed that her eagerness was only growing larger and larger, and winced. He resolved to find out whatever it was that Rosanna had done to piss off Meciél, if nothing else than to make sure he never did it himself. He did not want to be on the receiving end of her temper, especially when she lived in his head.

The light at the end of the shaft was growing larger and larger and Harry prepared himself for whatever lay below, certain that it was a trap of some kind. He couldn’t think of any other reason why there’d be a room this far underneath the earth, unless it was some kind of bomb shelter or an archeological dig for dinosaur bones. Suddenly, the walls of earth that had surrounded him were gone and a large cavern revealed itself. Harry caught a glimpse of rocky walls, too natural to be manmade, before a problem presented itself.

“How was I going to stop again?” he asked, his eyes widening as the ground rapidly overtook his vision.

‘You weren’t.’

“Whose idea again was it to drop down the dark and scary trapdoor?” Harry groaned.

‘I don’t think that they gave us much of a choice,’ Meciél replied grimly.

In the one or two seconds he had left before he splattered along the ground, Harry tucked in his arms and legs, the defensive magic around him molding around his body, and muttered a charm. Something flashed from his wand, striking the rocky ground just an instant before Harry. The blue-coated Denarian slammed into the ground...and bounced right back up again. Harry flinched. Even with the charm and the shield blanketing most of the impact, it felt like somebody had just thrown a brick at his face, punched him in the gut and kicked him in the balls all at the same time.

Wheezing, Harry bounced up and down a few more times before finally landing on his feet. He stood on the rapidly-hardening rocky floor as the charm quickly wore off, shaking his head dazedly. His eyes darted around him, looking for a trace of Rosanna, but all he could see through the darkness were some faint outlines of some walls and not much else. Loud thuds and thumps echoed throughout the cavern as the rest of the floor followed him down, smashing apart on the rocky ground and sending splinters of broken tile and floorboards everywhere. The sound died down after a few moments, leaving nothing more than some residual echoes and the sound of Harry’s own breathing.

“Well,” Harry said dryly, his voice echoing throughout the large cavern. “I’ll have to admit, I’ve never done that before. I could use a damn light, though.”

He took a step forward and promptly froze as something clicked beneath his feet. There was a whirring noise as something shot out

from the ground, spinning wildly in front of his face, and a sudden and horrified realisation hit Harry grimly.

‘Landmine,’ Meciél supplied quickly. ‘Reinforce your shield, now!’

Luckily for Harry, Meciél’s mental communications were interpreted by his mind much quicker than normal conversations- probably because she skipped straight past the ear and translation and spoke directly to the brain. With a flare of Hellfire, the fading defensive magic surrounding him flared with blue magic and Harry was still blanketed by the opaque screen of azure magic when the landmine went off.

The explosion tore through the cavern in a flash of light and a forceful blast. The shield shimmered, deflecting or absorbing most of the close-ranged blast and saving Harry from harm. The force of the explosion did send him careening backwards and he stumbled, struggling to stay upright. As his feet dragged across the dirt, he heard several more clicks and dismay flashed through him. He wasn’t going to like this at all.

Three more mines went off, then another, and another, and two more. It was as if entire floor was covered in explosives as gigantic explosions roared through the cavern. Chunks of stone and dirt whipped at Harry’s shield, the shrapnel moving fast enough to tear through steel plates. Harry gritted his teeth, the wand trembling madly in his hand as the shield around him literally glowed under the strain it was under. Fire, smoke, dust and dirt surrounded him, pushing him and pulling him in multiple directions. In what seemed like hours, Harry was flung around the room like a ragdoll, bouncing across the ground and smashing up against walls as the explosions blanketed him with a never-ending shower of pure kinetic force. Harry was barely aware of the forces that slammed into his body, bruising tender flesh. Something cracked in his chest, but Harry ignored it as he focused every fiber of his mind into sustaining the shield around him. The wand clutched in his hand was shuddering madly, runes flaring with crimson light and smoke curling off the wood as obscenely large amounts of Hellfire poured into the spell. After a few moments, the explosions died down and Harry crashed to the ground with a final thud. The ground was still rumbling ominously and thousands of

glowing red-hot rocky shards littered the ground, casting a dim light in the dust filled room.

“Shit,” Harry groaned weakly as the shield dispelled around him. He lay there for a moment, wincing as Meciél rushed to knit his broken rib back together. “I’ll...tell you what, Meciél, I...I wasn’t expecting that.”

‘Neither was I,’ Meciél admitted, and there was a touch of worry in her voice. ‘Perhaps we were too hasty in chasing after Rosanna.’

“Perhaps you were too hasty,” Harry corrected. He would have adopted a snide tone if he could have managed it, but his sore and aching body protested at moving the throat muscles requiring it. Slowly, he staggered up to his feet, emitting short, sharp gasps of pain. “Fuck! I should have gone the long way! This is...ow!”

He glanced down at his wand and grimaced. The runes were still glowing crimson-hot and the wood seemed to have burned a long strip through the thick, leather glove, burning the tender flesh beneath. Harry shuffled his wand and held it out awkwardly as he glanced around.

‘Who do you think is waiting for us?’ He mentally asked Meciél, suddenly aware that talking out loud was probably giving away his position to whatever the hell else was down there with them.

‘I don’t know,’ Meciél answered. ‘This dust may be obscuring us, but it’s also obscuring them. Remove it.’

Harry nodded sharply, even though there was really no point, and twirled his wand. He whipped it around his head and sent a powerful wind to push away all the dust, his eyes narrowed for any sign of movement. The dust was pushed up to the ceiling, revealing an empty, darkened, crater-filled room only lit by the rapidly cooling embers on the ground. On one side was a small tunnel; on the other was a gigantic rocky wall.

A rocky wall that had cracks in it.

A rocky wall that was leaking torrents of water.

“Oh, fuck me,” Harry murmured as the wall crashed down under the force of tons of water. His sharp eyes caught movement in the surging tide, of grey, streamlined bodies with fins and long, prickled backs with tails, and he scowled. “Oh, fuck me sideways.”

A/N: Been a while guys. I just finished my exams a few days ago, then spent a lot of my free time playing Fallout 3 and Red Alert 3. Notice how a lot of awesome games coming out have '3' at the end? Here's chapter 8, which has been up at DLP for a couple of weeks now but I was too lazy to upload it here. I'm gonna start writing the next chapter right after I post this, so hopefully you'll see it in a couple of days...unless I get distracted by my games again.

A sweeping tsunami as high as Harry raced at him, water splashing and spraying across the grimy rock. Harry spun around and he held up his wand. Hellfire flared in his mind, rushing through the runes on his wand and bathing him in a dim red light. The tsunami swept at him and Harry saw a flash of streamline grey before it was upon him. It crashed on him and there was a blinding flash of light as a curious buzzing filled the air. The tip of Harry's wand glowed with a strange grey light and the surging water buckled and fell back, sweeping by on his sides and wetting his feet but doing little else. It was as if Harry had placed a wall directly in front of him, forcing the water to go around and deflecting most of the force behind it. At the same time, an opaque dome shimmered around his head, a bubble-head charm cast merely by reflex.

'You know, Moses could do this with one hand,' Meciell mentioned casually. 'And it was an entire sea too.'

"Why don't you go and marry Moses then, if he's so great?" Harry snapped, a bead of sweat dripping down his forehead and into the surging river below Harry's feet.

Nonetheless, Meciell's moment of levity made Harry relax somewhat and he took a deep breath as he sighed. The water was raging around him, sweeping past his form and crashing at the other end of the giant cavern, but it would be back and it would likely sweep him off his feet. Harry estimated that he had twenty or so seconds left and his keen eyes glanced around the room.

“Plans?” He asked out loud, turning his head but keeping a firm grip on his wand as he held back the tsunami that threatened to crush and batter him on the hard, rocky walls.

‘We could stay and pursue Rosanna, although she has likely set up more traps, or we could leave,’

“Getting the fuck out of here sounds good,” Harry said grimly. “I-“

He paused as a streak of grey hurled itself at him down from the waters. Harry caught a flash of sharp, white teeth and little beady eyes before his wings shot out from his back, speared into the shark and tossed it aside like one might do with an empty can. The body disappeared underneath the raging waters around him, the only indication of the shark’s death bubbling up to the surface as a pool of blood.

“Is it bad that I’m suddenly remembering those old Animal Planet documentaries I used to watch when I was six?” Harry asked, cocking his head thoughtfully. “Because I remember there was something about sharks and blood.”

Another large maw burst from the surface from behind him and Harry instinctively ducked, his wings swinging behind him and slicing the shark from head to fin. The shark flopped onto the ground and was taken along by the current. At the same time, a large resounding boom roared throughout the chamber and Harry’s head shot up, his eyes widening with surprise.

“Well... shit,” he deadpanned.

Large explosions were ripping through the roof in a series of timed, consecutive blasts- no doubt more of Rosanna’s explosives at work. The roof began to crack and break apart, rocks and debris the size of a car dropping down and into the water. Smoke pumped through the air, making everything hazy and blocking Harry’s sight, even as the surging water rose to his knees. It seemed there was no limit to the tide, and Harry recalled seeing a lake by the house.

“You had to admit...” Harry started, still keeping the majority of the water at bay with a single and constant spell. “Rosanna’s really outdone herself. What a sneaky little bitch she must be to pull this off.”

‘She’s never been strong and she’s had to offset this by being craftier and more devious than the rest of her kin,’ Meciél told Harry. Even she sounded a tad worried, although that worry was tinged with something like disappointment and an utter fury. The emotions made sense by her next words, which sounded like they had been forcibly dragged out of her. ‘Go. Leave. Let her have her victory today. Who knows what else she...’

Whatever Meciél was going to say next was cut off as three things happened simultaneously. From the smoke-hazed air came a falling piece of debris, at least three times the size of Harry himself. His wings swept up in a single, clear movement, chipping into rock and then using the momentum to hurl the piece of debris aside. At the same time, long snapping jaws burst out of the water and Harry’s free hand grasped the sword of the cross and met the crocodile’s teeth with a blaze of silver fire and gleaming steel. The debris crashed on the ground with a boom, causing the rock beneath Harry’s feet to shudder, but the crocodile’s momentum was powerful enough to send the now-headless beast crashing into Harry. Half-a-ton of big, scaly and smelly flesh slammed into Harry. Although Harry was able to shrug off a blow that would have rendered a normal man useless, he was knocked off his feet and his wand fizzled out with a puff of grey smoke. Before Harry had even hit the ground, he was swept up in a powerful current as the built-up water slammed into him and sent him under. The bubble-head charm flickered around him and promptly collapsed, dissipated by the powerful torrent.

He fought the urge to take in a breath as the current pushed him along the jagged rocky ground, his wings scraping against the slippery rocks in a vain attempt to slow him down. He kept a firm grip on both his wand and the sword, clutching metal and wood tight in his respective hands. Sleek bodies darted around him and one of Harry’s arms brushed against something rough and leathery. Harry quickly brought his arm back in, a flash of panic entering his mind for a second, and his wand came up. His mouth opened uselessly, a trail

of bubbles rising to the surface as he reflexively mouthed the incantation, and a streak of green light shot out, sizzling water sending a pack of sharks scattering. The current pushed him along and Harry groaned as he was slammed into the rocky wall on the other side of the cavern, his voice sounded distorted in the water that surrounded him. His wings swept back, smashing into stone and lodging him in place as he twirled his wand, pushing the water back away from his head.

As air hit his face, he took in a gasping breath of fresh oxygen, panting. The smell of smoke and dust was thick in the air, almost stifling, and there was something sticky trickling down the back of his head. Harry didn't need to feel it to know that he was bleeding from a head wound.

"Fix that, could you?" He asked with a sigh, spitting out a mouthful of water and coughing. Without waiting for a reply, Harry concentrated and attempted to disapparate. "Figures," he sighed when nothing happened.

A floating piece of rock became his next attempt at escape, but it failed as well and Harry threw away the potential portkey with a scowl.

"I'm going to kill this bitch!" he snarled, his anger and annoyance increasing by every second. He spotted something from the corner of his eye and growled. "Oh, fuck off! Carnifico!"

A shark went limp as a glimmering arc split it in two and the water was stained with blood. True to their nature, the other sharks ignored Harry and dove in on their dead comrade, tearing into the newly bloodied flesh with relish. Harry ignored them and tried to get a bearing on his surroundings, but it was too dark and there was too much smoke for him to decipher where he is. He could feel his limbs shaking but Meciél's handy manipulations of his nervous system made it felt like he was toasting in a sauna.

'Wait a moment,' advised Meciél, her voice distant.

A moment later and his view on the world changed. To Harry, it was as if he were standing back in the same spot he had landed after

falling into this cavern of death traps, except that everything was glowing in a silvery light, making it easier for him to perceive through the darkness. He quickly found what he was looking for, the entrance to a small tunnel that appeared to lead upwards into what was no doubt more traps and sharks and high-explosives and other annoying little things like that.

“Good,” Harry murmured. “Where are we now?”

His vision changed again, his surroundings becoming a silver blur, shooting towards one of the sections on the eastern wall. Harry took careful note, his mind already rehearsing the spells he’d need to make the hundred-metre distance between the exit and where he had pinned himself. Around him, a series of brightly glowing figures burst into existence. Meciél had literally painted all of his enemies- if you could say that about some mindless animals- for him.

“Let’s go, then,” Harry declared.

With a few flicks of his wand and the complete evisceration of a shark, Harry managed to make it to the small entrance and clambered up onto the rocky ledge. A split second later, another shark leapt at him from the water but was batted aside with a sweep of his wings. Harry let out a huge sigh as he shook his head, spraying icy-cold water around the narrow, damp tunnel and feeling a lot more relieved- and excited- than he showed.

“You know, these wings are actually pretty cool,” Harry commented, flexing his wings. They shot out around him in a disturbing visage of a featherless angel, scraping against the jagged walls. “It kind of makes up for...”

There was an odd clicking noise and something shot out of the wall in a blur of speed. Harry’s reflexes, however, were superior to most beings on the planet and a few that resided elsewhere, and he curled his wings up around him. Something sparked as it struck the bone and there was a clatter as it bounced on to the ground. Harry smirked, before his face froze and pain lanced through his side. Three more objects had shot from the walls, two of the thin, jagged darts bouncing off his wings but one taking advantage of the distinct lack of

flesh on the bones to shoot past and slam into the side of his ribs. Harry's eyes widened in shock and he squeezed them shut, letting out a loud hiss of pain.

"Ow!" he declared flatly, in a strained voice. He glanced down and winced at the sight of the jagged dart protruding from his torso. "Do I...oh, that smarts! Do I leave it in or do I take it out?"

'Make no sudden movements,' Meciél said sternly. 'This is not a good situation to be in.'

Harry felt her on the top of his subconscious, analysing everything he sensed with a mind far greater than his own. Still, the throbbing pain in his side wasn't dimming down at all and Harry grimaced as he slowly reached over with his wand-hand. When he didn't receive a complaint from Meciél, he pulled the spiked dart out and winced as his ribs flared.

"Tricksy little bitch, ain't she?" Harry grumbled.

There was a blur of movement in front of him and suddenly his mind was ablaze with Hellfire, Meciél taking control and slashing up with one of his wings. Harry blinked in surprise even as the wing blocked a large blade, which had swung from the ceiling faster than Harry could see. He only had a moment to feel astonished before Meciél brought up his other wing, blocking another blade.

"Shit!" Harry snapped, bringing up the sword of the cross across his head, just in time as yet another blade swung down, threatening to take off his head. The force behind the blow that slammed into his sword was too great to be just gravity, and the clinical and detached part of Harry's mind wondered if there was some kind of propelling mechanism involved.

The rest of him focussed on the loud, ominous 'click' as the blow sent him reeling backwards, his foot touching something small and hard. There was a whirring a noise, something exploded upwards from the rocky ground and suddenly the entire tunnel was full of pinging noises. The mine exploded in a shower of little metal balls and the walls erupted in a shower of sparks as metal bounced off rock.

The next few moments were a frenzy of movement and brief flashes of what could only be described as sensory overload. Surrounded by a hastily constructed shield and ignoring the dozen or so ball bearings that had ripped through his body, one coming dangerously close to his head as it had taken off half his ear, Harry practically sprinted forward, his veins surging with adrenaline, Hellfire and panic. Fiendfyre formed around him, crushing through the walls and floor. The powerful cursed flames undoubtedly set off the traps that caused the roof to start collapsing in on him but it deflected and protected him from dart-like projectiles and pendulum-like blades that swung from the roof at every interval. The attack came from everywhere and even Harry's enhanced reflexes couldn't block all of them at once.

More explosions went off, ball-bearings shooting past the fiendfyre, coated with the cursed flame and little more than molten steel but still bouncing off Harry's hasty shield with loud pinging noises until the sound was ringing painfully through his ears. Some of them broke past it even as Harry pumped more and more magic into the half-formed shield, but there was no time to stop, no time to slow down or else he would die, so he took the pain with a face that could have been carved from stone and continued sprinting. Finally, there was something ahead of him, a glimmer of an entrance enhanced by the light emitted by the Fiendfyre. As the roof started to seriously cave down around him, Harry gritted his teeth, enhanced his limbs with all the Hellfire he could muster and shot towards the supposed safety at a speed that would put Olympic athletes for shame. His wings shot out around him, digging into the stone, and Harry rocked on his feet and pushed himself forward, soaring out the entrance of the tunnel amidst a sea of flame and rock.

He landed painfully on an increasingly familiar rocky ground and the Fiendfyre died down around him as the tunnel behind him groaned and shuddered, the roof burying the narrow space with rocks and debris. There was still the occasional muffled thump and the odd pinging noise but it became oddly silent as Harry lay there, his entire body radiating with pain that even Meciél had trouble in dulling. Hellfire ebbed from his aching limbs, leaving him feeling oddly weak and tired. There were certain aches on his body that Harry knew were serious injuries. Some of those metal balls had ripped straight

through him, after all. He was just glad that Meciél had such good control over his nervous system because he did not want to know what he was really feeling at the moment.

“Damnit!” he hissed softly to himself, ignoring a pained ache from his heart. “Damn, damn, damn! I...that...Meciél...it hurts, fuck!”

‘You’re wounded, beloved,’ Meciél told him, and her voice was worried. Hellfire was gathering in his chest and Harry was barely aware that he was only breathing at certain intervals, Meciél timing rapid bursts of healing with the gathering of precious oxygen for his brain. ‘You’re wounded badly.’

“It can’t be...that...that... bad,” Harry panted, his teeth gritting as he pushed himself up. He eventually settled on a kneeling position. “I still have my penis...after all.”

He quickly took an inventory check, making sure he still had his trusty wand and the gleaming sword of the cross, which was quickly becoming a hindrance. If the stupid lump of metal wasn’t going to help him out on this one then why cart the extra weight around?

‘Consider this,’ Meciél said quietly, even as Harry felt her expend all of her effort into patching his tattered body back together. ‘To come through that relatively unscathed is nothing short of a, dare I say, miracle? We were lucky, perhaps too lucky for it to be just luck.’

“Ah,” was all Harry uttered. He felt vaguely surprised as he continued his spot-check and frowned, suppressing the wince as pain shot through the right-hand side of his face. “Meciél?”

‘Yes?’

“You haven’t seen a couple of my fingers around, have you?”

‘Can’t say I have,’ answered Meciél after a pause. ‘I’ll get onto them later, but forcing the tissue to regenerate entire appendages will take time. Hours, even.’

“Could be a problem,” Harry agreed wearily.

‘Quite,’ Meciél answered, and she sounded concerned. ‘Are you well, Harry? You sound rather off and I haven’t the effort to decipher the chaos that is your mind at the moment.’

“I’m angry, Meciél,” Harry said blandly. “Very, very angry. It’s the type of angry you get when you get hurt and you want to punch somebody.”

‘I see,’ Meciél noted carefully.

“I’m going to kill Rosanna, Meciél,” Harry said quietly. “And I’m going to take my time. I’m going to enjoy it. I’m going to make the bitch scream. I will do things to her I have never done to anybody else in my life. I will show her just how low I can sink.”

‘You are angry.’

“Yeah,” Harry drawled out slowly, almost a hiss.

His breathing was harsh and there was a disturbing glint to his eyes and he rummaged through his coat, finally producing a pencil. He snapped it in two, dropped the sword (how he had managed to carry it with only a thumb and a pinkie was beyond him) and calmly shoved the broken wood into the bloodied stumps that used to be his fingers. Pain flared in his mind, but it was okay. Harry was in a lot of pain at the moment, what was a little more? Harry kept the pieces of wood there as he tied it down with some loose threads, ripping off the small patch of his shirt that wasn’t bloodied or wet, until the broken bits of wood were properly jammed into his hands. He picked up the sword and experimented with his new appendages, gripping the hilt as firmly as he could. It felt odd, but it would have to do.

‘Inventive,’ Meciél offered.

“I’d use magic but her mines seem to react to it,” Harry said quietly. “We could be surrounded and not know it.”

‘Here’s what I was able to get from what I saw after we came in,’ Meciél said.

Harry looked up and his vision flickered, another one overlapping the darkness he was seeing. Around him were crumpled bits of rock and debris and the lingering remains of Fiendfyre, seemingly frozen in time. The tunnel and the wall he had come out of remained shrouded in darkness, which was logical since he had had his back turned when he had come hurtling out of it. Harry glanced across the ground and breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that it seemed relatively undisturbed. There were no indications of any traps there, no scruff marks that might have been a buried mine.

He glanced up, wincing as something inside of his made an odd squelching noise. Meciél murmured an apology as something dribbled out of one of the holes in his chest. A moment later, Harry felt the skin close up and Meciél moved to the next serious injury. He tried to survey the roof but Meciél had only got a glimpse of part of it through his eyes and most of it was shrouded and dark. There was something though, a curious trapezium-shaped object that Harry had to squint at for a few moments before his eyes widened. It wasn't a trapezium; it was a cut-off rectangle- an air duct!

"Meciél, ears!"

Meciél was ahead of him, following his thought pattern a little better now that she had repaired the damage to his heart. Harry cocked his head and stopped breathing, listening into the darkness as carefully as he could. One of his ears was throbbing madly so Harry cocked his head to the other side, his eyes fluttering shut. It was mostly silent, but there was a faint noise, yes. It was...hissing?

'Gas!'

Harry held his breath as he hauled himself up, clutching his wand and sword tightly. With a weak swipe, silver flames ignited at the edge of his blade and banished back the darkness that had surrounded him. He was in another large cavern, smaller than the other though. His eyes shot upwards and he scowled. There were four air ducts spewing out an almost transparent mist, a mist that had already reached down to his head height. He blinked as an odd burning sensation gathered behind his eyes, his vision blurring, before he

snarled and swiped his wand. There was a rush of wind and a loud pop as Harry simultaneously banished the mist away from his face and cast a bubble-head charm over his head. He raised a hand, the bubble-head charm shimmering as his fingers felt the warm liquid dripping from the corner of his eyes. They came back stained with red.

“Explosive mines, swinging blades, hidden darts, attack sharks and now nerve gas?” Harry muttered. “This is a bit much, don’t you think? There’s enough stuff here to take out half a damn city!”

‘And who knows how many more rooms like these there are,’ Meciél pointed out darkly.

Harry stood there, strangely hesitant to take any action as the deadly gas filled the room. He still couldn’t see through the pitch black and finally decided that if he was going to do anything, he’d need to know what was around him.

With an elaborate twirl of his wand, Harry cast a series of spells in quick succession. Light flared from the tip, blasting back the darkness that surrounded him. At the same time, he was suddenly surrounded by a thick, glassy-like shield of crimson and black fire, pure Hellfire solidified into a powerful defence. His feet stiffened as magic stuck them to the ground and the bubble-head charm flashed and became even more dense and suffocating. Behind his magical defences, Harry waited for the ball to drop.

He didn’t have to wait long. There was a loud ‘click’ above him and Harry’s head shot up; only to reflexively turn as a blinding light filled the air. The light was enough for Meciél to capture a perfect image of his surroundings and, even with his eyes squeezed shut; the room appeared in his vision.

‘There’s a doorway to your right,’ Meciél noted quickly.

Harry was glancing at the ground, making certain that there were no hidden explosives or bear-traps or whatever else Rosanna had decided to throw at him. As a round of concussive explosions boomed above him, the sound strangely dulled by his shield, Harry flicked his wand and moved, his eyes remaining shut as the bright

light flashed around him. The vision changed in his head, Meciél making minor adjustments as he moved to keep it constant, even as her voice instructed him calmly within his head.

‘Two steps to the right....stride of 32cm....keep going for another ten paces...no, nine paces- you overextended over that crack...turn 32 degrees clockwise...now 10 degrees counter clockwise...another few degrees to the right...perfect!’

Harry could hear tons of earth and rocks falling behind him, concluding that the explosion must have caused a cave in- no doubt Rosanna’s attention in the first place. The tunnel before him loomed closer and closer in his mind’s eye until he was practically at the entrance. The powerful light that had been burning his eyes, closed as they were, dimmed down and Harry opened them but didn’t slow down. He surged through the narrow entrance and up the slope, adrenaline and Hellfire pushing the pain from his mind.

There were more explosives in this tunnel but the scattered shots of ball-bearings pinged against his shield uselessly. Spears jutted from the walls around him, shattering on his shield- Harry even catching one lancing from the ground and crushing it with his bare hands. The runes of his wand flared with crimson light as he expertly weaved and dodged through the well-set traps, more than prepared for them after having had a few moments to regain his bearings. The ground shuddered and crumbled before his feet but his wings shot out and stabbed into the wall. Winds howled and raged from the chasm beneath him, bringing with it a thick scent of sulphur and other chemical smells, and Harry wrinkled his nose, using a combination of his wings and hellfire-enhanced limbs to push himself forward, only stopping to blast apart a large round boulder that rolled down the slope.

Harry reached the end of the chasm, dropped to his feet and darted on forward, his breathing heavy in his ears. This wasn’t the most conventional fight he had ever been in but he had to admit that it was a little more fun now that he’d absorbed what was happening. As clicks echoed around him, Harry crouched down and used feet enhanced with Hellfire to jump forward and into the light ahead. Explosions roared behind him as Harry jumped into the next death-

trap, tiny bits of debris pinging off his shield uselessly. He landed unsteadily on his knees and glanced up, his furious green eyes taking in everything at once. He was in the middle of several stories of ramps and scaffolding, dozens of men wielding large guns aiming at him. On the highest ramp staring down at him with contempt was a slender dark-eyed woman.

“Rosanna!” Harry hissed under his breath, rising to his feet. The rage in his eyes was only dwarfed by the appearance of fear in Rosanna’s, who was staring into Harry’s wreathed irises and paling. Perhaps she could see Meciél behind the teenage boy that she inhabited.

“Kill him!” The woman shouted furiously.

Gunfire exploded from all around him and Harry reflexively flinched as sparks exploded mere centimetres away from his face, bouncing off his defensive shield with little trouble. He stood up, his good hand clutching his wand and his mangled hand managing the sword the best he could, and glared up at Rosanna. He never broke his gaze as fire reared up around him and he lashed out at the scaffolding, searing through metal support frames and sending entire ramps of guards tumbling painfully to the hard ground. Most of them didn’t stand up again.

There was a puff of smoke in the corner of his eye and Harry jerked his head back, surprise flittering on his face as a rocket shot past his head. It disappeared to the other side of the room and Harry felt rather than heard the explosion as the ground shuddered, the sound of gunfire roaring inside his head. More fire lashed out, enveloping entire squads of men and another metal frame gave way, sending the dozen or so men standing on top of it crashing to the ground. On its way down, however, it glanced one of the other metal frames- the one where Rosanna stood on, and with a creaking groan it too tumbled to the ground in a surprising show of good luck.

“Protect the Mistress! Protect the Mistress!”

The shouts hollered from around him as a half a dozen little grey balls were thrown at his feet. Harry stared down at the quizzically, even as a glimmering arc of silver light severed a burly man into two. There

was a sudden bright flash and the ground shattered under the concussive force of the powerful grenades, sending Harry flying. The crimson domes of defensive magic around him shimmered and flickered but cushioned most of the blow from Harry, leaving him feeling mildly bruised as he crashed into the ground. A wing lashed out even before he landed and a nearby man was impaled, lifted up and hurled at a comrade in the time that it took Harry to stagger back up again, his wand literally burning into his hand.

What happened was what Harry just loved in a fight, pure and utter chaos. There were bodies everywhere, all clamouring to kill him. Some continued firing from the distance, bullets hitting their own more than they shattered against Harry's shield, but most of them just charged at Harry with a fanaticism that could only be magically induced. Some of them used the butts of their guns as clubs; others were wielding knives, shovels, pickaxes- he even saw a damn chainsaw take off the arm of a maddened comrade as it swung at him. His wings lashed out around him, protecting his back and sides, while his wand literally whittled man after man, every second spell glowing with the deadly eerie green that was so feared in the Wizarding World. Still, there had to be hundreds of them, some storming in from doors to the side with loud battle cries and a complete disregard for their own life.

"Vorago Aquilus Exussum!" Harry roared.

Hellfire roared through him and into the ground around him, which cracked and shattered in a radius of at least three metres. Fire roared up from the splits as they widened to become a chasm of yellow and orange flame, which was only whipped up into frenzy as a ferocious wind howled into it from all directions. Harry stood in this searing bonfire as the men around him were all sucked into their deaths. Screams of pain and torment accompanied the howling wind in a matter of moments as new bodies rapidly clambered in, too absorbed in their quest to kill Harry to pay any attention to a little thing like fire. They died too, even as they stepped over the sizzling and blackened corpses of their friends.

"Fanatics," Harry muttered in disgust. Perhaps once, they had been normal men and women with jobs and homes and families. Now all

they were witless servants, all but willing to throw their lives away for their mistress.

Harry stepped from the flame, his eyes trying to pierce through an air filled with smoke and bodies. Gunfire rattled off in the distance, some striking his shield and some missing him completely, and Harry growled out in frustration.

“Where’d she go?” he snarled to himself. He hadn’t even wanted to do this in the first place and yet he had come all this way and endured all of those stupid fucking traps for a bloody reason! He was going to show that fucking bitch just how low he could sink!

Something shimmered in the smoky haze around him and Harry paused. A second later, a streak of wailing green light, only a few shades off the killing curse, zoomed past him. The noise left chilling echoes in his ears as another streak zoomed through the smoke, striking his shield and shattering instantly. In that split-second Harry moved as a barrage of green light literally pummelled into where he had been standing. One of them struck him on the chest, piercing the wards on his coat with ease and turning a good portion of his lower insides into pure mush. Blood spluttered from Harry’s lips but he ignored the searing pain, his injured hand tightening around the Sword of the Cross, and leapt forward.

A silver bar of flame blurred, batting away two more of the strange piercing spells and striking something soft. There was a piercing shriek of pain as Harry lashed out with his wing, slamming into a vulnerable body and lodging itself in, little spiked ridges of bone grappling the flesh and holding tight. Harry lifted up his wand, his eyes glittering with triumph and spat out “Avada Kedavra!”

There was a sudden flash of green, a loud noise akin of a howling wind and the sound of a body thumping to the ground as the force of the spell literally pushed it off his wing. At the same time, the sound of gunfire came to a halt. Harry banished the smoke to the other side of the room and glanced down at the person he had just killed. Dark-braided hair had been bound tight to her head and her warm brown eyes were dull and listless. All in all, Rosanna was a beautiful woman, even dead. His head shot up as he heard choking and gagging

noises and he saw the few remaining servants clutching their heads, blood streaming from their ears. He watched, gaping, as they all collapsed and stilled.

What had once been a raging battlefield less than ten seconds ago was now eerily silent. Harry stared down at Rosanna's body with an expression of extreme befuddlement, despite the suddenly glowing sensation that Meciél was radiating, which could only be described best as a liquid orgasm that flowed through him, banishing away his pains and aches.

"That's it?" He muttered.

'You sound surprised,' Meciél all but purred.

"But...it's...she's dead,"

'I am well aware of that, believe me,' Meciél said with a satisfied hiss.

"Kinda...anti-climatic, wasn't it?" Harry asked, glancing around sceptically. "All those traps and all that suspense and this is it? A simple killing curse to the chest and bam, we're done?"

'I'm afraid I don't understand,' Meciél said, although her tone was still too satisfied to sound like she cared. 'Rosanna is dead. We are alive.'

"But...nobody just dies like that in real life," Harry muttered with a scowl, bending down to pick of the silver coin that rolled out of Rosanna's mouth. "There's always an epic duel and lots of fire and witty backtalk. You don't just...die... like that."

"You sound disappointed," somebody said smoothly and Harry's head shot to the side, where Verrine was walking through one of the doors, looking pristine and smug even in her muddy clothes.

"I think I am," Harry muttered, feeling tired and weary as the Hellfire and adrenaline was leaving his body. "I went through all of that and there's not even an impressive duel at the end. She liquefies my stomach and then has the indecency of just dying so easily? Man, do

you know how painful it is to grown a new spleen? The liver is easy, but the spleen? It's gonna be a painful night."

"Well done, milord," Verrine said instead, scanning the carnage and bodies around her with a visibly impressed expression. "I...didn't think that you'd be able to do this so easily. Nicodemus might have been able to, but nobody else."

Harry glared at her, his eyes narrowed. There was something entirely too smug about her, an arrogant tilt of the lips that he suddenly wanted to burn off her face. Rosanna had known he was coming, or suspected, at least. How loyal had Verrine been to Rosanna? His wand rose despite himself, he had more than enough left in to take care of her, when she spoke, perhaps sensing his mood.

"You see, milord, this was your true test," she said quietly. "You've taken on a fortified position, which had been anticipating your attack, and won despite the odds. Had you failed, it would have been clear that you were not strong enough to deserve my loyalty." Her gaze surveyed his body and her eyebrows shot up in surprise. "I don't understand how you are still walking," she breathed quietly to herself.

"And Rosanna would have praised you as a hero, no?" Harry asked tightly, having the sudden urge to brutally maim the Denarian in front of him.

He winced as Meciél did something to his insides, her soothing power already beginning to mend what had been broken. He may not have some of the specialised powers that the other Denarians had but it'd take nothing short of losing his head or complete internal organ failure to put him down for good. Meciél was cool like that.

"It's like that when you play both sides," Verrine answered with a smile, although she was casting Harry a wary look with her beautiful blue eyes.

"Gonna do it again?" Harry growled, the runes on his wand glowing threateningly.

“No, milord,” Verrine answered immediately. She cast another look around her, her gaze resting on Rosanna slightly longer than usual. “I don’t think I’ll need to.”

“Okay.” Harry nodded and all but snarled the next word. “Crucio!

Verrine collapsed in a heap, her screams ringing out through the room as the Cruciatus curse fully expressed Harry’s displeasure. Harry watched with bloodied teeth and a menacing grin as she thrashed before him.

“You fucking bitch!” he roared. He flicked his wand, cancelling the curse on his victim, and summoned a fiery mass of Fiendfyre that hovered around his body. Several strands licked their way up his arm, apparently harmless for the master of fire, and morphed into vague representations of coiling serpents. The fiendfyre came dangerously close to Verrine’s face and she swallowed, pushing away the lingering pain in her mind.

“Wait!” She pleaded. “Meciel must have known I’d try this, or something like this! It’s what I did before! You’ve won! You have my loyalty until the day you die! Ask Meciel! Ask her how loyal I was after I tested her in the ruins of Babylon! You have it!”

‘She’s right,’ Meciel added quietly.

The fiendfyre inched closer and closer and Harry wasn’t budging.

“I fought for her! I killed for her! I’m loyal!” Verrine snarled, flinching at the unexpected heat. Her skin was shimmering, as if she were about try a demonic transformation out of sheer desperation. “Don’t kill me! I can be useful to you! She knows it!”

Are you begging me for your life?” Harry whispered to her coldly.

“Yes!” Verrine hissed and the fire stilled.

“No pride or dignity or anything like that?”

"Only if you want it, milord," Verrine whispered. "Don't...don't send me back to the darkness. I couldn't take it. Use me. Use my talents and my knowledge. Use my body! Just...don't kill me."

"Use you," Harry repeated in a murmur.

There was a tense silence and the fiendfyre halted. Harry looked to be in deep thought, his lips unconsciously moving as he obviously conversed with Meciel. Verrine lay on the ground, trying to regain her composure as the fiery snake blazed before her. The dark magic behind that spell was enough to even frighten her. Finally, the young Denarian seemed to have come to a decision and the fire reared up. Verrine's eyes widened and she opened her mouth as fear flooded through her, but Harry merely gestured to the side with his wand and the fire washed over the battlefield around them like a giant wave crashing on the beach.

"Well, you do have a nice rack," Harry murmured. He smiled at her bitterly. "Maybe I'll let you live for a little longer."

You have walked into an enemy ambush and against all odds, you have succeeded- to a point."

Silence reigned between them for a few moments, Verrine still shuddering from the after-effects of the curse. Her fury was easy to see now that the immediate threat was gone but there was also a healthy dose of fear that Harry found quite pleasing. Finally, she gave him a strained smile and stood up, straightening her shoulders and eying the Fiendfyre roaring behind Harry uneasily.

"Perhaps I would take you home, milord," she said quietly, far different from her pleading only a moment ago.

She moved forward but froze when Harry's wand rose, then slowly took another step forward. Her arm draped around his shoulders, only quivering slightly as the tip of Harry's wand dug into her stomach, and she took on Harry's weight and assisted him in hobbling towards the exit. She didn't even slow down when Harry's other hand curled up around her breast and roughly squeezed it.

"If I may say, you seem rather fixated on my host's breasts," she said. "Unusually so."

"They're kinda like stress-balls," Harry muttered, giving them another squeeze. "And no matter how much of a traitorous bitch you are, you're hot. Well, not hot, really, but not ugly. Well, maybe slightly better than average."

Harry removed the arm around him as they reached the door while Verrine's face flickered with displeasure. As he stepped through, he stopped and turned his head. Verrine met his cold gaze head on, her face becoming an emotionless mask.

"Don't you ever betray me again," Harry started softly. "If you do, I'll kill you."

Unease flickered over the female Denarian's face and her eyes unconsciously shot to the side, where the Fiendfyre was already blazing as it consumed all evidence of the battle. It wouldn't be long before the entire mansion went up in flames, much like Verrine's freedom. Still, there was no doubt of the power of Meciél's new host. Tessa was good- great, even, but she was no Denarian Lord. Really, all she had to do was help him remove the rest of the Denarians then kill him before he killed her- because she knew he would. She knew that once she had helped Meciél take her revenge, she would follow her former master's to the grave.

Verrine could find out where the prominent members of the Blackened Order were hiding, but she wasn't strong enough to kill them.

Harry was strong enough to kill them, but he couldn't find them.

They both needed each other. When that changed, Verrine had no doubt as to what would happen.

It was risky. But Verrine, Head of the Blackened Order of Denarius- now that had a rather nice ring to it.

A/N: Long time no see, guys. I'm hoping to spend a lot more time on The Denarian Lord from now on. It's be good if this was mostly finished by the time I head back to university. I want to thank the following people from DLP for the spell-checks and grammar-checks that made this chapter flow a hell of a lot better: Inferis and KrazQ

"Well, this was a complete waste of my time," Harry said flatly, eying the busy traffic around him as he leaned back in the café chair. He took a drink of his coffee, carefully eying his companion on the other side of the table. "There are twenty other things I could be doing right now apart from sipping cheap coffee on a Chicago street corner. Sleeping, eating, drinking something decent, having sex with impressionable and attractive young women..."

"Please," Verrine snorted. She flipped her dark hair over her shoulder- a rather annoying habit that she had as Harry had found- and eyed him disdainfully. Despite her tasteful dress of crimson silk, her clothes were rumpled and her harried face was screwed up into an irritated scowl. Although, that could also been that she had been listening to Harry whine for the past forty minutes. "Your sex life is as active as these damn smugglers we're looking for."

"We haven't found them yet," Harry muttered, wincing as a car let out a loud beep at another, the horn resounding in his head. "Fucking drivers..." he muttered.

"Exactly," Verrine said dryly. "Milord," she added belatedly.

"Oh, Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" Harry snapped, pausing and giving off a last "Ha!" for good measure.

It had only been a week or so since Harry had followed Verrine's last advice and walked into Rosanna's ambush. It had taken him a few days to recover since he had needed to grow a few extra appendages, and even now some of his fingers felt stiff and awkward. It was only at Meciél's strong urging that Verrine was still alive. Harry would be the first to admit that the intricacies and subtleties of backstabbing and espionage escaped him, but it had been his

opinion that Verrine was too dangerous to be left alive. Meciél had disagreed, so Harry had reluctantly stayed his wand. Really, it was only a matter of time before Verrine outlived her usefulness and then Harry had Meciél's full blessing to kill the rotten traitorous bitch. Until then, he would sit at tables and sip coffee with her.

"Just admit it. You screwed up," Harry drawled.

"I did not screw up," Verrine insisted fiercely and Harry rolled his eyes.

"Where are we?" Harry asked her calmly.

"I don't see how..." Verrine started.

"Where are we?" Harry asked again, although his voice came out more as a demand than an actual question.

Verrine sighed and answered between gritted teeth. "We're at a small coffee shop..."

"And cheap," Harry added, waggling the half-empty mug of weak coffee in front of her face. "Don't forget cheap. We're at a small and cheap coffee-house which, surprisingly, doesn't house crates of small arms for the Order of Blackened Denarius' nefarious ways. Well, I suppose you could use this sludge as a biological weapon of some sort. It tastes like one."

"Well, stop drinking it then," Verrine snapped. At Harry's dangerous look, she closed her mouth and took a deep breath, as if she was trying to calm herself down. When she spoke up next, her voice was significantly less heated. "Perhaps my informants were....wrong," she admitted painfully.

"Really? No!" Harry gasped sarcastically. He let out a derisive snort, his lips twitching as he took another sip from his mug. "Funny. I could have sworn that I heard something about your informants as...what was it? The 'best spy network in the world'?"

"We'll find them!" Verrine insisted, burying her nose in a stack of papers before him and racing through them in a matter of seconds,

as if there was something there that she had missed the first time around.

“I’m telling you, it’s just not there,” Harry said lazily and smirked.

Verrine was about to say something else when a shadow fell over their table. Harry had already been aware of the person approaching them, his hand discreetly slipping inside his jacket to brush against his wand, but hadn’t recognized them until he looked up. It was a girl, an admittedly beautiful girl with tanned skin, long blonde hair and blue eyes wearing tight red t-shirt and a pair of denim shorts. She was staring at Harry with dawning recognition, a delighted smile crossing her face.

“No way!” she said loudly. “Harry? Harry Potter?”

“Speaking?” Harry offered, cocking his head and narrowing her eyes. There was something annoyingly familiar about her and it wasn’t until her next words when Harry remembered where he had seen the girl before.

“It’s Melissa!” she exclaimed delightedly. “I met you at the Four Seasons on the Kona-Kohala coast! Hawaii! Remember me?”

“Oh, Melissa!” Harry exclaimed with a sudden- and obviously fake-grin. He stood up and gave her a hug as Verrine watched on with a suspiciously blank gaze. “I remember you!”

“Really?” Melissa squealed, practically beaming at him.

“It’s strange, actually,” Harry continued, shooting a look at Verrine. “I was just talking about you- well, sort of, I guess. Verrine, remember what you were saying about before, about trying to find something of mine. Well, here it is!”

“Her?” Verrine said dubiously, peering at the tanned woman in Harry’s arms. “Really?”

“Really,” Harry confirmed with a nod and a bright smile.

“Oh...I’m sorry,” Melissa said suddenly, her face blanching. “Is that your...am I interrupting...”

“No, no, no.” Harry was quick to assure her. “She’s just a business colleague. We’re doing some work here in Chicago.”

He stood up and took out a seat for the perky and slightly air-headed blonde. Melissa beamed at him as she sat down and Harry wagged his eyebrows at Verrine, the latter looking a mite disgruntled as she shuffled a stack of papers.

“I didn’t know you lived around here,” Melissa said as Harry sat back down, her blue gaze never leaving Verrine’s face. “I thought you lived in England, what with your cute little British accent.”

“Ah, well, my job takes me to all sorts of interesting places.”

“Right...you’re one of those paparazzi people,” Melissa said, a finger placed on her lip thoughtfully.

“Please, Melissa,” Harry said with a pained expression. “I’m a freelance photographer. Don’t group me in with those...morons.”

Melissa giggled, but her eyes were settled on Verrine and she gestured at the dark-haired woman.

“Who’s that, Harry? Another one of your models?” she asked. There was a strange edge in her voice and Harry’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, especially when Verrine answered for him in a frigid voice.

“Model?” Verrine repeated, looking quite disdainful. “Hardly. It will be a very cold day in hell before I allow this lecherous pervert to see me half-naked.”

Harry could see Melissa repeat the words ‘lecherous pervert’ softly and caught her eye. He casually leaned in closer to the tanned athletic blonde and whispered into her ear ‘jilted bride’. Melissa’s mouth opened in dawning realisation and she threw the other woman a look of pity, before settling quite comfortably on Harry’s arm.

"How did those pictures of me come out?" she asked excitedly. "Did the magazine like them?"

"I'm sure some magazine would have liked them, if they even had magazines up down in Antarctica," Harry responded dryly and smiled at Melissa's shocked look. "All my luggage somehow- and for the life of me I just don't understand- managed to get in the cargo-hold of a research plane down to Antarctica. It's going to be seven months- actually, six months from last week- until it gets sent back."

"Oh my God," Melissa gasped in horror. "That's horrible!"

"How does a parcel that's clearly marked for England get thrown on a..." Harry stopped and took a deep breath, hiding a smile behind his hand as he rubbed his nose. "You know what; I'm not getting into this rant again. I'm in the company of a beautiful woman who really doesn't need to hear my whining."

Melissa giggled as Verrine held back a snort, a disdainful and disgusted expression plastering her face as she bent back over the notes. The American blonde threw Verrine another look, her eyes strangely calculating for somebody who, so far, had appeared nothing more than a typical airhead. Harry almost tensed at that until Miciel chuckled in his mind.

'That's merely the look of one territorial female to another,' she explained in amusement. 'Jealousy can make the most unintelligent look like a genius when the paranoia calls for it.'

"You haven't met Verrine before, have you?" Harry continued, smiling politely- something that even he would admit looked strange. "Melissa, this is Verrine, my...well, I guess you could call her a secretary of sorts. She's helping me find some stuff."

"I didn't know you had a secretary," Melissa mused obliviously.

"Neither did I," answered Harry and his eyes were cold when he swung them on Verrine, looking completely out of place next to his bland smile. "She came somewhat recommended to me from one of my bosses. Trust me when I say you would not believe what I had to

go through to get her and, frankly, she's not really proving her worth considering the price I had to pay."

'Three severed digits, four broken ribs, a good chunk of your liver and your gall bladder, a cracked femur, a broken nose, an earlobe...' Meciell rattled off the list of injuries in his mind.

Verrine met his gaze coolly as Harry continued.

"It's coming to the point where I might simply have to get rid of her," he said and smiled chillingly. "So don't disappoint me, Verrine."

There was an awkward tension at the small table, a tension that Melissa remained totally oblivious to as she tried to flag down the waiter. Harry kept Verrine's gaze until the other Denarian dropped her head, shuffling her papers and beginning to go over them once more. It was impossible to tell what she was feeling.

He turned to Melissa and caught her hand, entwining his fingers with hers and bringing it down.

"Now, Melissa," he said with a cheerful grin. "Do you really want to eat at this little dingy restaurant when we could go somewhere...nice?"

"It's a cafe, idiot," Verrine muttered under her breath.

Harry's smile never wavered as he kicked her under the table, and Verrine hissed beneath her teeth, throwing him a furious glare. Melissa was blushing but she smiled coyly. Suddenly, she let out a yelp and jumped upwards.

"Something moved under the table!" she cried out.

"What?" Harry chuckled and bent his head down.

He felt it the same time as he saw silver light briefly flash from the long parcel he had with him. It was the tug at his heartstrings that had absolutely nothing to do with love, and he stifled a groan as a sudden rush of anger surged through him. For the love of...why now of all

times? The sword vibrated again, rattling against the table, but Harry ground his jaw and forced a smile.

“Must have been the breeze,” he lied.

Melissa nodded and breathed a loud sigh of a relief, her hand held over her heart. She sat back down as Harry discreetly rubbed his chest, a pained expression crossing his face. Oh, how he completely loathed the damn tugging. He gave the case a sharp tap with his foot, resisting the urge to scowl down at it. There was no use in complaining about it. The sword always seemed to know how long it was going to take for him to finally succumb and do what it was telling him to do. Well, it could wait until Harry was done with Melissa.

The girl was chattering on and on but Harry tuned her out, listening in well enough to smile politely and ask the occasional question or two. The Sword’s calling at his heart was increasing rapidly, becoming far more urgent than Harry was used to. He grimaced, rubbing his chest, and nudged the sword with his foot again. At the same time Harry nudged it, the sword let out the strongest shudder yet.

Harry’s leg recoiled at the touch, coming back up and knocking at the table. Simultaneously, the waiter hurrying to one of the tables with a tray of ice-creams slipped on something and sent his tray flying. The ice-cream splattered across the ground as Harry tried to stabilise himself. His right foot stepped into the ice-cream, sending him slipping as the left foot came flying up.

What happened next could only be described as a series of acrobatic movements that would put a circus to shame. Harry’s legs slipped from beyond him and he landed painfully on his arse. The table was pushed up and hot coffee struck Melissa in the face. Verrine’s papers went soaring everywhere as Harry’s arms lashed out reflexively, catching onto Melissa’s shirt. He reflexively tugged- there was a loud ripping noise and Melissa shrieked as Harry ripped her shirt off her chest. She jumped up, her hair dripping with coffee and glaring down at Harry, her mouth opening and closing wordlessly.

A resounding crack filled the air and Harry flinched as Melissa slapped him clean across the cheek, before turning and rushing out

of the cafe with eyes full of dramatic tears. Harry sat there, well aware of the startled and bewildered stares of the patrons and stunned waiter as Meciél sent a pulse of Hellfire through his body.

‘Harry?’ Meciél asked, her voice trembling somewhat.

‘Yes?’ Harry answered tiredly.

‘You broke your arse.’

‘Of course I did,’ Harry thought flatly. At that exact moment, a large scoop of ice-cream which had somehow splattered itself against the roof dropped down onto his head. Harry felt the icy-cold liquid dripping down the side of his face but said nothing, merely brushing the ice-cream off and standing up.

“Are you alright, sir? I’m so sorry!” The waiter was babbling.

“Go. Away.” Harry commanded dangerously and the waiter squeaked, bobbing his head and racing inside as he muttered about mops and buckets. Harry watched him go with detached eyes before turning to Verrine, who was still sitting down, startled. “Verrine?”

“Yes?” Verrine answered cautiously.

“If you laugh, I will murder you,” Harry promised. He bent down, wincing at the pain in his lower back- Meciél was obviously focusing on the crack in his bones before the bruises- and picked up the package for the Sword.

“Understood,” Verrine said crisply. She also stood. “I will...go and do something...elsewhere then.”

“Good idea,” Harry said flatly. He gripped the package tightly, barely restraining the urge to rip the sword out and stabbing it into the nearest innocent person, thereby destroying its holy power. “I’m going to see what the emergency is about. Then, I’m going to kill the bad guy. I’ll probably kill the victim too.”

“Have fun?” Verrine offered tentatively as Harry stalked away.

It was cold. Hope Carpenter clutched her tiny arms around herself and huddled against the rocky wall behind her, her short blonde hair slick and plastered against her scalp as she breathed in the humidity of the caverns. Even now, she didn't fully understand what was going on. One moment she'd been playing around with Megan and Stephanie at recess and the next moment she had woke up here with throbbing ache in the back of her head. Her feet and hands were bound together by thick, coarse rope. She wasn't the only one bound; around her lay at least a dozen other people, all unconscious and between the ages of at least five to twelve. She supposed it made her one of the oldest there.

That didn't make her feel better at all.

She became aware of muttered arguments from up ahead. Hissing in pain, Hope turned her head and tried to peer up the tunnel. It was dark, too dark to see properly, but she thought she might have been able to make out a couple of dark figures arguing with each other.

"...we have enough. If we wait any longer, we'll be found out!"

"....the more, the better...virgin sacrifices will enhance our power...three more would make us equal a Warden..."

"...Council is not stupid! They'll... and the Nevernever will resonate our summoning..."

"...not going to be found out..."

The voices grew inaudible as they travelled away, leaving Hope with faint clues and ideas of what was happening and sudden frenzy of despair. She jerked and flailed against her bonds, trying to shrug them off or cut them on the rock. Her flailing legs crashed into rock and she screamed behind her gag as her knee leg flared up with unbearable pain. Her muffled cries ended in a round of whimpers as she sagged to the floor, her sudden fit all but exhausting her. What was she going to do? Who would rescue her?

Hope wanted her Dad. She wanted him to come blazing in with his magical sword thing and save her from these dark caves, then turn to her with his kind smile and make her feel safe like he always had. He was always away saving other people, why couldn't he save her?

Perhaps God had a sense of irony or perhaps it was pure coincidence, but a resounding explosion roared through the caverns at that exact moment. Hope blinked back her tears, jerking up and scrabbling backwards as bits of rocks and dust clomped to the ground by her feet. The dust in the air was enough to make her sneeze behind her gag as she stared wide-eyed at the looming figure, which had just stiffly walked through the rather large hole in the wall. Silver light bathed the room, the brightness making her flinch and avert her eyes. Her heart was swelling with emotion, tidal waves of relief and happiness banishing away her despair, but a few things suddenly clicked as she gazed back at the figure.

Had her Dad always been that short?

And since when did he wear leather?

The dust cleared and Hope's eyes widened as she recognized the person before her. Her eyes took in everything, from his face, with the faint scars and the furious scowl, to the glowing sword held casually over his shoulders. Looking at that expression, Hope was suddenly unsure if she wanted to be rescued or not.

Then three of the cloaked kidnappers entered the room with billowing robes and glowing staffs, and Hope decided that yes, she did want to be rescued, even if it was by her sister's boyfriend or whatever. She took a deep breath and let out the loudest muffled scream from behind her gag.

"Invictus Alargo!" one of the robed wizards screamed, brandishing his staff.

Harry lifted up the gleaming blade, ignoring how it sizzled into his flesh (of all the times to forget his gloves!) and batted the pillar of fire away. Silver light sizzled and flared and the flames were extinguished, casting a dim light over the dark and damp tunnels and allowing him

to see his opponents. His eyes flickered to the bound captives lying against the wall. One of them was awake, a little blonde girl that seemed awfully familiar, and she was staring up at him with pleading eyes.

“Let me guess,” Harry drawled, eying the enemy disdainfully. “You’re trying to do some kind of ritual for power and these are your sacrifices. Fucking hell, this is the type of cliché situation I was hoping to avoid today. A little coffee, a little sight-seeing, badgering Verrine, and it would have been a fun day but nooooooooo! You guys couldn’t help but plot and do your bad-guy things.”

The three robed men straightened, two of them glancing hesitantly at each other while the lead one stared at Harry boldly. His posture just screamed superiority, and Harry stared back at him coldly. Harry’s eye twitched at the smugness he could feel. Nobody had the right to feel that smug when there were still some clumps of fucking ice-cream nestled in his head.

“You’re a rather odd choice for a Knight,” the man commented in smooth aristocratic tones. “One as young and vulgar as you is not what I would picture when I thought of one of the vaunted Knights of the Cross.”

“I say ‘fuck’ one time and I’m vulgar?” Harry snapped. “Geez. Trust me, there are a lot of things more vulgar about me than my language- and talking about language, what’s with that crappy fake accent. Nobody speaks like that anymore. It’s only the try-hards and losers who want to make themselves appear to be cooler than they really are.”

“You’re very stupid, boy,” the man said quietly. “You come barging in here and you think you’re going to leave alive?”

“Yeah, that’s pretty much it,” Harry answered, punctuating his answer with a thoughtful nod. “You did forget the part where I kill you all though.”

“Really?” somebody hissed into his ear.

Harry didn't even have the chance to react as somebody, the leader, stepped behind him and shoved a long, thin blade into the back of his skull. The man gave a triumphant bellow as he yanked it sideways, ripping it viciously through bone and flesh. A misty red haze sprayed through the air as the sword tumbled from Harry's limp hands, his green eyes widened with shock.

"I'm disappointed," the wizard said, chuckling to himself underneath his hood. "A knight such as you couldn't even tell the difference between an illusion and a real person."

"Are you sure?" came Harry's gargled, low voice.

The man stared down in surprise as the bloodied Harry turned his mangled head, staring up at the wizard impassively. Those injuries should have killed anybody, Knight or not! Harry smiled at him dangerously as a dark, muddy substance dripped from his orifices.

"It seems...to...me that the one...who can't tell the difference..." Harry began, only to pause.

His frame shimmered and flickered, skin shriveling up and liquefying. The leader gave a horrible cry of disgust as Harry's very form melted off his form. It flowed to the ground, forming a rapidly expanding puddle of multiple colours. All that was left was a strange figure that seemed to be entirely composed of rocks. It looked wrong, somehow, although its basic form was humanoid with two rocky legs and one arm- the arm that had probably been holding the Sword of the Cross. It had no head, only an enlarged torso made up of several pieces of smooth slabs of stone.

"Is. You." The thing concluded in a gravelly, hoarse voice that didn't even attempt to sound human. It managed to somehow radiate a sense of smugness even as it crumbled into a pile of useless rubble before the dark wizard's feet.

The silence in the cavern was tense, the sound of harsh breathing offset by the 'ploink' of dripping water. The leader of the band of cultists looked tense, his eyes darting everywhere from beneath his hood as his two minions glanced at each other uneasily. Finally, the

leader of the dark wizards grunted and dropped his aristocratic tone, revealing a rough, southern accent.

“We’re doing it now,” he drawled quietly. “If we can summon the Great Leader, no man or Knight will be able to stand in our way.” He absently waved his hand at his illusion to dispel it as he continued. “Jenkins, Milo; take three of the hostages and go to the centre chamber. I’ll...” He paused and irritably waved his hand again, the illusion remaining in place before him. “What the...”

Abruptly, the illusion looked up and seemed to smile under its hood. With a hazy shimmer, the illusion disappeared and something sounding like bad static from a radio or a TV blasted through the air. All three men clasped their ears, their faces contorted in agony as they opened their mouths, the screams lost over the piercing noise. Blood dribbled from their nose, ears and eyes as they shuddered and twitched, their prone forms collapsing to the ground in crumpled heaps.

Harry stepped out from where the leader’s illusion had been standing and knelt down by the leader’s side, a wry smile on his face. “You know,” he said. “In a place very far away from here, that’s considered to be the most beautiful piece of music ever recorded. Strange, huh?”

The man wordlessly moved his mouth up and down as Harry stood up again and leveled his wand at him. The last thing he saw with red-hazed vision was a blinding green light barreling down to meet him.

Harry stepped back and dismissed the now-dead dark wizards in favour of the hostages slumped against the walls. Even with his keen sight, it was hard to pierce the darkness shrouding the caves and he sighed irritably. It only took a thought to activate the Sword of the Cross lying prone across the ground and a blaze of silver light banished the darkness away with a soft, gentle glow.

“A bunch of brats,” Harry remarked dryly, looking at the unconscious children. “Of course they are, because I’m just a regular old hero who can’t even get the freaking girl at the end.”

There was a faint muffled noise and Harry glanced towards the source.

“Ah, right,” he muttered. “The blonde brat.” He strode over and squatted down by her form, staring into her blue eyes with a bored expression on his face. “You wouldn’t happen to have some cash on you, right?”

The girl stared back at him blankly, still muffled by the gag.

“Of course not,” Harry sighed.

His shoulder slumped forward as he casually sliced away the bonds that held the girl with a flick of his wand. The gag dropped out of her mouth and the girl took a deep breath before letting out an ear-splitting scream, her gaze fixed on the dead bodies. Harry swore loudly and clambered backwards, wincing in pain.

“For the love of...!” he swore loudly as the girl’s scream died down. He stared at her with wide eyes. “What the hell was that for you stupid little blonde?”

“They’re dead!” the girl shrieked, sliding away from the bodies as if they were zombies rising from the dead to feast on the flesh of the living. Harry took a glance back to make sure that wasn’t happening, and then directed a fierce scowl in the girl’s direction.

“Well, yes,” Harry snapped. “Dead people usually tend to be, well, dead.”

The girl was frozen in shock and Harry heaved an irritable sigh. With none-too-gentle hands, he reached down and grabbed her by her short ponytail and pulled her up from the ground. The girl immediately squealed, her arms and legs flailing uselessly around her.

“Ow! No...wait...ow...stop it...what are you...ow! Let go!” the girl demanded, wincing in pain.

One of her kicks got lucky, thumping against Harry’s stomach, but he didn’t even look winded as he let her go. She staggered on her feet,

glaring at him as he smiled mockingly down at her, rubbing his stomach.

"Ow," he deadpanned "You really hurt me."

"Shut up!" the girl hissed, bright red splotches staining her cheeks.

"You fight like a twelve-year old girl," Harry commented with a mocking smile.

"I am a twelve-year old girl!"

"Really?" Harry gasped in mock-surprise. He gave her an obvious once over and put on a puzzled expression. "Seriously? You look like you're six or something, like a little baby."

The girl clenched her fists into a ball, her terror transformed into ire as she glared at Harry furiously. Harry just chuckled as he batted her lightly across the head.

"Cheer up, you brat," he said, his mood lightening at the expense of the little kid in front of him. "You're going home soon. All I want you to do is to put one of these on everybody's pocket." He put a bag of small marbles in the girl's hands. "I'd do it myself but my stomach is too badly injured. I need time to rest."

The girl took the small bag with a mixture of nervousness and annoyance. She looked confused but seemed happy to do what she was told as she knelt down next to the first unconscious prisoner. At the same time, Meciél stirred in his mind, indicating her desire to speak to him.

"Hmm?" He murmured softly, his eyes and ears trained on the shadows around them.

'Does that girl seem familiar to you in anyway?'

Harry nodded his head as he strode over to his glowing sword and squatted above it.

'That girl is a Carpenter,' Meciél told him in amusement.

Harry halted his movements.

"Get out of here," he declared, earning a strange look from the aforementioned girl.

'I recognise her. Besides, doesn't she look like a little miniature Charity Carpenter?'

'Well, no, not really,' Harry grumbled back in his mind. 'She doesn't have any breasts.'

'Charity did have other attributes, you know,' Meciél said with a sigh.

'Really? I didn't notice.'

"I'm done," the girl said from across the room. She seemed rather calm about the whole matter, Harry deduced with a sinking feeling in his stomach, much calmer than an oblivious and magically-unaware kid should be.

"I'm going to go with a theory here and say that your last name is Carpenter," Harry put forward. "Am I right?"

"I knew it!" the girl exclaimed. She leveled a finger at him with a determined expression on her face. "I thought it was you! You're that boy that came over!"

"Ah," was all Harry uttered as he rubbed his forehead with a grimace.

"You ate my dinner," the girl added with a slightly annoyed tone. "And you were mean to Mum."

"Yeah, that sounds like me," Harry agreed with a nod. He rolled his eyes. "This is just great. Not only is a fantastic opportunity ruined for me, but it's you lot that's ruining it for me."

The girl was silent as Harry picked up his sword. The glow burned into his fingers and Harry hissed, throwing it over his shoulder and

into the cane-like scabbard. A swipe of his wand activated the small portkeys that the girl had just delivered, sending the remaining prisoners to a small little fountain across the street from where he had been having coffee.

"Alright, brat," Harry said flatly. "Time to take you home. Grab my hand."

The girl narrowed her eyes and stared at him suspiciously.

"You're not some kind of pedophile, are you?"

Harry made a choking noise as his regular breathing was wracked with a sudden fit of coughs. He stared down at the girl with nothing short of horror on his face.

"Where the hell did that come from?" he demanded. The girl merely raised an eyebrow and he scowled. "Trust me, kid, you're not my type. For one, you're blonde. For another, your tits are too small."

The girl crossed her arms across her chest self-consciously and glowered at him.

"I am the biggest in my class," she muttered, mostly to herself.

"Being the biggest in a class full of surfboards really doesn't lead credence to your claims," Harry remarked dryly. "Now, take my hand or I'll leave you here with the dead people. The dead people who will turn into zombies...the zombies who will catch you and peel the flesh from your bones and eat you alive!"

"I'm soooooo scared," the girl mocked, but she did look a bit uneasy and swallowed as she visibly restrained herself from looking at the corpses, as if she were suddenly remembering that there were in fact dead people lying behind her. She suddenly seemed more insecure as she darted across the ground and took Harry's hand.

"By the way, it's Hope," she remarked quietly

"You're an optimistic little brat, aren't you?" Harry scoffed.

"It's my name!" the girl, Hope, clarified, her voice a little bit louder than before.

"Yeah, whatever you say, brat," Harry muttered, spinning on his heels and beginning the apparition.

"Could your house get anymore sickeningly cliché?" Harry muttered as he led Hope up the cobbled pathway to the front door of the perfect suburban house before him.

The sun was shining brightly in the sky and birds were chirping in the nearby trees. Add a freshly painted picket-white fence, a neatly trimmed lawn and a house that looked like it had come fresh from the 1950's, and you got the residence that was the Carpenters. Harry found the whole thing annoying.

Then again, he did have a fondness for rundown, dark and damp apartments, so perhaps he was biased.

Harry rapped on the door and fidgeted on his feet as he waited. There were hurried footsteps from inside the house and surprise shot through him as the door was spun inwards with great force, revealing a haggard and clearly distressed Charity Carpenter.

The tall, blonde bombshell looked like she had been having a stressful day, but quickly regained her composure. Her eyes briefly widened at Harry's familiar, but unwelcomed, presence and her face took on a cool, distant expression.

"You," she said flatly. "What do you want?"

Harry didn't say anything, but he reached beside him and grabbed the partially concealed Hope by the back of her school jumper. With a loud squeal, the small blonde was hoisted up by Harry and dangled before her mother like one might dangle a kitten by the scruff of its neck.

"I presume this is yours?" Harry responded dryly.

Charity's eyes widened and a burst of emotion flashed across her face. She reached forward and yanked her daughter out of Harry's grip and clutched Hope to her chest. It was as if something heavy had just lifted off Charity's shoulders as the tall blonde let out a huge sigh of relief, whispering platitudes in her daughter's ear. For her part, Hope didn't burst into tears like Harry had been expecting but her eyes were bright when Charity let her go and she made discreet attempts to rub at them. Naturally, Harry called her on it.

"Aw, the little baby is crying," he mocked, a huge grin on his face as he leaned against the doorway.

Hope balled her fists and glared at him. "Shut up!" she snapped.

"You got a little bit of snot running from your nose," Harry said, pointing at his own nose and gesturing at Hope with his head.

Hope blinked and pat down her clean and snot-free nose, while Charity sighed.

"Why is my twelve-year old daughter more mature than you?" she asked flatly.

"She has inhibitions where I have none," Harry answered casually. He gave Charity a wide grin and gestured at himself with both thumbs. "Anyway, guess who just saved your children...again? C'mon, you know you want to say it."

"Thank you, Harry," Charity said solemnly, clutching her daughter's arm with her hand. "You saved my daughter from...what was it?"

"Evil dark wizard cultists," Harry supplied helpfully. "Seriously, I don't think I've ever met a pair of more incompetent parents. Here you are, worshipping a deity that seems to do His best to get your kids killed. You should convert. I know this nice little cult, really low key but you get to eat a goat's penis." He cocked his head, frowning. "I think they think that it's meant to help with fertility or something but, frankly, I think they're just closet goat-fuckers."

Charity stared at him wordlessly.

"No?" Harry asked innocently. "Sorry, I guess I presumed you were into that kind of stuff. Anyway, where are the rest of your brats? I didn't hear any outraged fanatical yelling when arrived, which is kinda new. Don't tell me you lost them too."

"I sent them away to a safe place," Charity answered tightly. "I wasn't sure of who had taken Hope and I didn't want to put them in danger."

"Ah."

"I'm very thankful, Harry, truly," Charity said quietly.

Harry's face softened and a genuine smile crossed his face. A hint of a reciprocating smile crossed Charity's face until he spoke up, the smile never leaving his face.

"So, that'll be \$1500- what's that in pounds?"

"\$1500?" Charity repeated.

"That's how much you owe me for saving your daughter's life," Harry elaborated.

"You...charge people money?" Charity asked and sighed. "My word, you truly are a horrible Knight."

"Hey, I'm not running a...charity...here," Harry said with a snicker.

He grinned while Hope groaned at his obvious pun.

"You suck," she said flatly.

Harry's smile disappeared and he scowled at the girl, an annoyed glint in his eye. Before Charity or Hope knew what was happening, he had taken a single step forward and slapped his hand on the top of her head, grinding in knuckles.

"Ah...yuk! Noogie!" Hope squealed in pain.

“Who sucks now, blondie?” Harry taunted, only to be batted away by Charity. He frowned, only scowling even further as Hope daringly stuck her tongue out at him.

“Anyway!” Harry said loudly. “If you can’t afford it in cash, there are other ways of paying.”

“Oh?” uttered Charity, her voice suddenly dangerously quiet.

“Yeah,” Harry said with a smirk. With an exaggerated yawn, one of his arms stretched forward and landed on her warm shoulder. “There are.”

“Harry?” Charity asked faintly.

“Yeah?”

“I thought you should know that I think I’m about to break every bone in your hand,” Charity told him quietly. There was no anger or rage in her voice, just a simple and quiet certainty of how things were going to go down.

“Charity?” Harry asked, his charming smile never leaving his face. His other hand reached over to clasp the hand not attached to her daughter’s arm. “It’s alright. I can fix little breaks like that in seconds.”

“That’s good,” Charity said with a smile, and then squeezed down with her right hand.

There was a loud audible crack and Harry’s eyes bulged from their sockets as sharp pain shot up his arm. Hope gasped, staring up at the both of them with shocked eyes. Harry’s left hand was dangling uselessly in Charity’s deceptively soft palms and he grimaced, shaking his head in obvious discomfort.

“You’re stronger than you look,” Harry admitted.

“I get that a lot,” Charity retorted

"I bet," Harry answered with a wheeze. "Well, as much fun as this sexual tension is, I think I'm going to want my hand back now."

"Really? Are you sure?" Charity asked kindly, squeezing down with a bit more force and making Harry wince.

The Denarian Lord hissed in pain and glanced down at a shocked Hope, who was gazing at Charity and Harry's clasped hands with shock and awe. He managed a tight smile, already feeling Hellfire mending his fragile finger bones.

"What the hell? I was talking about a cheque, a cheque!" Harry snapped. He paused and a coy little smile crossed his face. "Hey, what did you think I was talking about? Ooh, tell me, was it..." He moved his head closer to Charity's head, his breath brushing against her ear in a mockery of intimacy. "Was it perverted?"

Charity grimaced and squeezed her hand tighter. Harry's smile disappeared and he grimaced, glancing down at Charity's inquisitive little daughter.

"Hope," Harry said and waited until the little girl's eyes were on him. "Your Mum is a bitch."

"Michael!" Charity breathed and Harry turned his annoyed gaze on her.

"My name's Harry, twit," he growled, before he realized that Charity was looking past his shoulder. He whipped his head around and stared into the amused eyes of his fellow Knight of the Cross, who had somehow managed to sneak up on him despite his advanced senses and whatnot.

"Harry, Charity," Michael greeted calmly.

"Michael!" Harry hissed and yanked his throbbing hands back. "It was...I mean, she...I...well..." He fumbled for his words. "Dude, she was totally coming on to me!"

"What?" Michael asked in puzzlement.

“What?” Charity demanded in anger.

“Coming on to you?” Hope repeated in confusion.

Harry’s eyes shifted and suddenly his stiffened, his posture just radiating danger and surprise. He lifted up an arm (his good one) and gestured madly behind Michael, shouting “Denarian!”

Michael whirled around, the slender travel case slipping off his shoulders, while Charity immediately pushed Hope behind her. To the Knight’s confusion, there was nothing there and he turned back to Harry only to realize that the real Denarian there had already disappeared in a perfect mastery of silent apparition.

“How strange,” Michael murmured thoughtfully as he rubbed his beard.”

Charity just grunted, while Hope peeked between Charity’s legs curiously.

“Daddy?” she asked tentatively.

“Yes, sweetie?” Michael asked kindly.

“Your friend is a complete nut job.”

A/N: Happy New Year, folks. Here's the next chapter for you. I actually threw out what this was supposed to be, just some minor Death Eater vs. Harry action, and chose to forward it to this one. My reasoning is that there's going to be more than enough action in this story and if I keep pushing it it will become boring. It becomes quite boring to write at times, which is why a nice characterisation scene really got me going. Thanks to DLP for thier help as usual. KrazQ and The Darim provided a handy spell-check, but if you notice anything out of place then feel free to tell me. If there's enough, I'll edit the chapter and re-upload it when the next chapter comes out. Later all, and have a good year.

The room was dim; large, billowy, black curtains draped against the windows and casting dark shadows in the stifling apartment. The light bulbs, grimy and almost black with dust and muck, were off, their fuses blown out by the presence of powerful magic long ago. The only light sources in the room was the faint light that seeped behind the heavy drapes and the glowing sigils that had been burned into the walls and roof. They glowed with an ominous crimson light, which flared and dimmed in a seemingly unpredictable pattern. The largest rune had been burned into the very roof of the tiny lounge, stretching from one side of the room to the other. It hummed and flickered uncertainly as the two occupants beneath it stared each other down. One of them was down on their knees before the other, a very beautiful dark-haired woman with immaculate and stylish clothing. The other was obscured and wrapped up in thick cloth and sat up on a pedestal of sorts so high that his head almost brushed against the roof, staring down at his servant with a hidden face. The atmosphere in the room was charged, both with emotion and magic, and occasionally the air would hiss and splutter, sleets of electric-like energy crashing against each other in a battle of power.

"So," the robed figure said coldly, his voice muffled by the cloth that surrounded him. "You have failed me yet again."

"She is exceptional at not being where she should be," the woman tried to justify. "She doesn't leave many witnesses whenever she

takes the field, so it's hard to keep track of her. I'm doing the best I can."

"Obviously your best just isn't quite enough," the figure hissed coolly.

His wrist twitched and a slender piece of wood fell into his hand. He raised it up and the woman twitched, her eyes darting from the wand and the locked door to her left. The woman's muscles tensed and she started as the cloaked figure made a series of lightning-quick flicks and waves. Instead of pointing the wand at her, he jabbed it into the ceiling and the rune flared a bright scarlet. Something pulsed in the air, sucking up all the moisture and leaving the apartment almost unbearably dry. The woman's tongue felt thick and she swallowed, licking her chapped lips as she frowned at the cloaked figure's next words.

"Do you know I can see your cleavage from up here? It'd be cool and all if they weren't so wrinkly and scraggy. Yuk. You have granny tits."

Verrine's eye twitched as Harry threw back the large cloth covering his head, a cocky smile on his face as he leered down at the kneeling woman.

"Can I ask why I have to kneel?" Verrine asked through gritted teeth as Harry looked away to inspect the rune on the roof with a thoughtful expression on his face.

"You can," Harry answered carelessly, prodding at a particular section of the elaborate symbol with his wand.

There was a pause as Verrine waited expectantly for an answer. After a few moments, Harry lowered his wand and nodded to himself in satisfaction. He glanced down at Verrine and frowned.

"Well?" He questioned with cocked eyebrows. "What are you waiting for, Christmas? Ask already."

"Why am I kneeling?" Verrine asked, although it came out more as a resigned sigh than anything else.

"Because I find it funny," Harry responded truthfully. He flashed her a bright smile and scratched his messy, soot-covered hair. "Anything else?"

Verrine said nothing but climbed to her feet as Harry chuckled in amusement. He brushed some of the soot off his large cloak and wrinkled his nose.

"Man, this stuff smells like crap," he muttered to himself, sprawling back on the chair, which was precariously balanced on two chairs, a table and a fridge. "I hate screwing around with the wards on this place. It takes some much bloody effort just to make some minor changes."

Verrine said nothing as Harry jumped from the towering stack of household furniture. He landed on his feet in a squatting position and stood up, eyeing the glowing runes with a critical eye.

"Ah, well, I suppose they'll do," the Denarian Knight dismissed.

He raised his hand and snapped his fingers, and Verrine watched with the slightest bit of jealousy at the display of magic as the runes disappeared from view, invisible to the naked eye. As old as Verrine was, she had reached her limits in skill and power quite some time ago and knew when there was a superior wizard before her. As the light began to dim from the room and the crackling bolts of energy faded away, Harry, ignorant of her slight scowl, shrugged off the thick, protective cloth covering him and threw it carelessly to the ground. He touched a spot on his stomach gingerly, noting the large hole and the flakes of dried blood staining his white shirt. The bare skin underneath was pale and unmarred.

"I suppose I got what I deserved," Harry chuckled. He glanced at Verrine and gestured at the hole in his shirt. "I crossed two lines over when I shouldn't have and got speared by a bolt of magic. It completely fried my stomach and intestines, had to take a twenty minute breather while Meciell fixed me up."

Verrine's eyes darted to the unmarred skin in astonishment.

"Not even Vesper could have healed herself that fast," the servile Denarian breathed, absently brushing her hair out of her shiny blue eyes. "Only Nicodemus could have done anything like that."

"Hey, hey, hey," Harry exclaimed, gesturing at himself with a wounded expression. "I'm the host of a Denarian Lord. Remember that."

Verrine inclined her head as Harry pulled open the curtains and allowed the sun to shine in the room.

"Drink?" Harry offered as he headed towards the kitchen, casually throwing his wand on the nearest armchair.

Verrine nodded her head, her eyes glued on the wand, while Harry left the room. As the sounds of glass and china clattering against each other could be heard as Verrine approached Harry's wand, more out of curiosity than malice. It was stranger than most of the Wand-Wizards wands she had seen before, with small yet elaborate runes carved into the very grain of the wood itself. The runes were familiar and she could associate them with the darker planes of magic, combined with some kind of symbols dealing with space and storage. She supposed it allowed him to channel his vast Hellfire reserves without shattering the core of the wand, but she had absolutely no idea how it worked. Meciel still was one of the most knowledgeable amongst all of the Fallen. Suddenly, a flicker caught her eye. One of the runes was sparkling, a tempting flash of Hellfire that drew her in. The very feeling of this tiny drop of power made her own access to the Unholy Flame seem like a trickling stream compared to a raging tsunami. Her fingers were trembling as she slowly reached out for the wand-

Only to have it snatched by Harry, who glanced down at her with an unreadable expression on his face.

"I wouldn't touch that if I were you," Harry said, the smile never leaving his face. "The wards are in a state of flux at the moment. One small spark of magic could send the whole place up, and not even I'd be able to survive that."

Verrine immediately snatched her hand back, her cheeks flushing with embarrassment. She coughed and smoothed out her skirt to hide emotions as she took the glass he handed her. Harry said nothing, but watched her as she took a gulp of the water, wincing as the strong taste of chlorine and rust hit her taste buds. Almost immediately, the taste smoothed out into a particularly nice wine she remembered enjoying back in the 1600's but there was a bitter aftertaste that made Verrine cringe.

"Oh, yeah, sorry about that," Harry said cheerfully, gulping down his own dirty water. "I'm sort of used to having it taste whatever I want it to. Never really bothered to get it fixed, the rust won't kill me and there's enough water in there for my body to survive. You can be surprisingly stingy after a childhood of poverty, even when you do have a bit of money."

Verrine eyed Harry carefully, noting his seemingly relaxed posture. It wasn't like the other Denarian to let his tongue flap loose. In fact, she was surprised that he'd even opened the door when she'd arrived. He had been in the middle of renovating his defensive wards and she didn't think that Harry trusted her enough to see his defensive layout—even if it did look exceedingly complicated. The lack of knowledge that she had about wand-magic was working against her in her dealings with Potter. She would have to remedy that before their inevitable battle.

"As I was saying," Verrine said smoothly, taking another sip of her water and managing to look and sound haughty while clad in soot and blackened dust. "Lartessa is furious over the death of Rosanna."

"Ah, poor old Tessa," Harry murmured with a slight smile.

"With the capture of her coin, Lartessa has lost both a prized subordinate and a somewhat cherished lover."

Harry choked on his water and glanced at Verrine with wide eyes.

"Lover?" He demanded. He sighed. "Man, if Tessa looks the same as Meciél remembers, then that would have been so hot."

Verrine said nothing.

"Is there anything else?" Harry enquired, carelessly throwing his glass over his shoulder. It shattered on the ground and Harry scoffed at Verrine's raised eyebrows. "I can fix it later."

"No," Verrine answered flatly.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk," Harry mocked, his green eyes radiating lazy amusement. Verrine felt something coil in the pit of her stomach as he prowled around her, restraining the urge to instinctively lash out against anything her senses perceived as 'dangerous'. Fingers brushed against her back, apparently examining her dirtied blouse (she was annoyed that all of her nice and expensive clothes seemed to get irrevocably dirty or damaged whenever Harry was around). "Verrine, Verrine, Verrine. You're letting the team down, you and your little scraggly granny tits."

Fury flared up within Verrine and she gritted her teeth angrily. Perhaps she was a tad bit vain but she had selected this host over four hundred years ago purely because of her physical looks. It was only a bonus that the host happened to be mildly talented in the magical arts. Verrine, with all of her experience, had discovered that it was the beautiful people that lived well in life. She didn't have the power or the necessary ambition to rise to the top of the Blackened Order of Denarius. Her one goal in her various mortal lives was to live comfortably. Beautiful people lived comfortably. When Meciell and her host destroyed the last remnants of the Blackened Order, Verrine would step in and take control merely for the sake of a comfortable life. There would be no more orders and missions that sent her into danger, that threatened to destroy her mortal host and send her consciousness back to the void.

She hated the void. She truly did. If she spent more than a short period of time in there, she wouldn't know what would happen to her. Perhaps her mind would shatter like many of her kin, pitiful beasts when they had been glorious beings. Perhaps she would harden up and gain the outlook she needed to rise and conquer. Neither scenario was appealing to her. She liked her relaxed outlook. It was enjoyable.

"Wow," came a loud comment, startling Verrine out of her daze. "The Alzheimer's has hit you already, has it?"

She looked up an smirking Potter, who was watching her with glinting eyes, as if Meciél was whispering into his ear just what Verrine had been thinking. She gritted her teeth and smoothed over her face as anger flared inside of her. It was obvious that Meciél would have to be removed if she wanted to live comfortably. The shrewd Fallen would never let Verrine live for what she had done. Perhaps she hadn't directly participated, but she was at least guilty for her inaction and, even after all this time, Meciél had not forgotten- or forgiven- her former allies.

"Is there anything else?" Verrine asked coolly.

"There's probably an 'you're ugly' insult lying around, but I can't be stuffed at the moment," Harry answered lazily. He waved Verrine away, as if dismissing a bothersome pet. "Shoo. Go and do your job. I have things to do and your ugly mop will only distract me."

Verrine bowed her head and strode from his small apartment without another word. If the door slammed behind her a tad harder than it needed to (with hinges cracking and wood splintering) then it was only because Harry Potter was a complete and utter bastard who couldn't appreciate true beauty. Verrine paused and gazed at her reflection on the recently painted white wall. After a moment, she smiled and smoothed her hair over. Perhaps she should go buy herself a new dress to cheer her up?

"Is it ready?"

"Almost, almost," Harry responded irritably, trying to juggle three plates of fresh fruit and a bowl of creamy yogurt as he made his way from the kitchen. He shot Meciél's apparition an annoyed glare as he entered the living room, which was still stripped bare from his ward modifications a few hours ago. "You live in my bloody head. Can't you tell how I'm doing?"

"Well, I suppose I could," Meciél conceded graciously, sprawled out on an imaginary armchair and dressed in some of the most provocative clothing that Harry had seen before. White and silver sheets of thin fabrics were the some of the best clothes to be ever invented, only topped by three-sizes-too-small bikinis and lacy lingerie. Harry's rose his gaze to meet Meciél's silver eyes and the Fallen chuckled, leaning forward on her chair and regarding him with slowing-curving smile. "But, my beloved host, where would the fun be in that?"

"Your utter sexiness will not stop my bitch-fest," Harry deadpanned seriously.

"Oh," Meciél acknowledged.

Without so much as single flicker of movement, Meciél's clothes changed from silky lace and sheer fabric to a more conservative skirt and blouse. Harry couldn't help but feel a pang of disappointment, to which Meciél smiled mischievously and purposely avoided Harry's eyes as she gazed up at the ceiling. Although her apparition was only an illusion inside Harry's mind, she studied the peeling paint and water-marked roof carefully, as if she could actually see what lay beyond her sight. Harry suspected that she could read his senses to a point where Harry being in the same room was just as good as actually looking at it. Nevertheless, his eyes flickered to the ceiling as well.

"It should work," Harry remarked confidently. "I rearranged the runes to compensate for the foreign energy. It was a bitch to do, since technically it's classified as a space/time spell, which really fucks up the anti-apparition and anti-portkey wards, but it should work."

"Of course it will work," Meciél murmured. "After all, I did help you."

"Your arrogance is only matched by mine." Harry grinned.

He took a few steps back from the summoning circle, raised his wand and concentrated. Meciél did her part as well, relieving him of much of the burden of moulding of the magic and forcing raging Hellfire into a series of specific burst rather than just one giant stream of roaring

power. Opening a portal to the Nevernever was an extremely complex task and even now, coming towards the height of his power, Harry couldn't do it without Meciél's help. That said, the series of powerful defensive spells- and some particularly nasty offensive wards as well- that Harry had installed in around his home hadn't helped the simplify the process as well. To touch on the very fabric of the Nevernever, to draw it to the real world and create a portal linking the two worlds that was stable enough not to instantly vapourise a person the moment they touched it, well, that was the very pinnacle of subtlety. Harry wasn't ashamed to say that he still had a few problems with subtlety. That was what Meciél was for.

The spell was beginning to have a noticeable effect as the very air before him started to shimmer. Light and colour was beginning to flow off the tiny little ripples that perpetuated the air. A bitter wind wafted into the room, bringing with it tiny flakes of snow and ice that fluttered through the room in a whirlwind of bitinglly chilly air. A smooth, even slit was appeared in the middle of all of this, as if somebody had taken a giant knife and sliced it downwards. Harry watched with satisfaction as the portal began to glow with a multitude of colours, before his eyes suddenly widened and he took a hasty step backwards. The roof and walls of his apartment began to glow bright scarlet as the runes and enchantments presented themselves. The gentle waft in the room suddenly turned into a screeching howl as the portal wavered and wobbled, the smooth and even slit fractured and became jagged. Snow clouded Harry's vision as he took another step backwards, his wand buckling and throbbing as he desperately tried to keep the spell from collapsing. It took more than a bit of magic to make a portal such as this and Harry had no interest in seeing just how badly the backlash would destroy his apartment, or possibly himself.

Suddenly, it was over. The light emanating from the runes stopped glowing as the portal stabilised. The colours whirled all together until it showed a cloudy sky and a rather fierce snowstorm. Harry spat out a mouthful of that snowstorm and glanced over his shoulder, to where Meciél's illusion was still draped over her imaginary armchair. The Fallen angel did look the tiniest bit sheepish (though Harry reckoned that he was the only one who would have noticed) but she gave Harry a reassuring smile.

"See?" she said, gesturing at the portal behind him. "I told you it would work."

"I don't call that working. I call that a potential fuck-up," Harry grumbled, turning back to the portal. "Now, let's hope that this works."

Harry opened his mouth and a noise came out of his throat, a series of lilting music syllables far too complex for the human ear to decipher alone. The words echoed around the room, reverberating around the room with an odd hitch, and Harry waited, his eyes focused keenly forward. At first, nothing happened and Harry felt like blowing something apart in annoyance. Then something twinkled in the corner of his eye. A single silver mote was floating in the air, sparkling gently with the powers of Winter. Another joined it, then two more, then a dozen- the air was full of sparkling motes, which fell to the floor and disappeared in pops of blinking light. A small, humanoid figure began to emerge from the motes and Harry smiled fondly as the small Faerie of Winter, Cessbulby, appeared before him.

The little pink-maned psychopath blinked curiously as she took in her surroundings, smoothing her white dress over her tiny little body. Her silver dragonfly wings fluttered behind her as she sniffed cautiously, her bright blue eyes zooming in on the food on the floor. At the offering of fresh fruit and yogurt, Cessbulby gave a loud, childish squeak of happiness and zoomed down towards it. The silver missile struck the platter of food and Harry glanced away in disgust as the little faery tore apart the food and began cramming it down her throat. Really, the little faery definitely had bad eating manners when she could make Harry, who had ripped human beings apart with his bare hands, cringe in disgust. After a few moments, Harry cleared his throat and Cessbulby looked up, her mouth bulging as she swallowed a grape.

"Oh! Harry!" She squeaked, flapping her wings and sending a spray of yogurt everywhere.

She darted upwards and zipped through the summoning had long ago declined using restraints against Cessbulby, figuring that she stood little chance of actually hurting him (although there was this one

incident that Harry tried to forget and made Meciél laugh every time). However, she came to a halt before she reached him and her face suddenly went blank.

"Oh, Harry," Cessbulby repeated, although this time the words came out with much less enthusiasm. "It's you!"

Harry watched bemusedly as Cessbulby crossed her arms, turned her head and promptly ignored him with a huff. After a few moments, it became clear that Cessbulby wasn't going to acknowledge him.

"What?" Harry asked in indignation. "What's the problem, Cess?"

Cessbulby didn't say anything but her wings buzzed agitatedly.

"What is it, Cess?" Harry asked, his voice becoming more firm.

"If I was talking to you, I'd tell you that I'm angry with you," Cess stated, placing a firm emphasis on the 'if'. "If I was talking to you, I would tell you that you haven't called me for ages! No strawberries for months! You only call when you want something! I wanted fruit and you didn't call me!" She paused and hastily added. "If I was talking to you. But I'm not. So nyah!"

"Oh, for the love of..." muttered Harry, rubbing his head. "Cess, it's your own bloody fault!"

"Is not!" This seemed to get a reaction out of Cess whirled around and glared at him furiously.

Unfortunately, because of her small size, it only made her look cute.

"Is so!" Harry retorted. "I've been trying to call you for ages! Look behind you! I had to open a portal just to find you, and even then it almost didn't work!"

Harry couldn't exactly see what Cess was looking at but he figured she was eyeing the portal he had just indicated. He waited as Cess slowly turned around, staring at him suspiciously with her glowing

blue eyes, and could barely suppress the amusement that flooded through him as Cess suddenly ducked her head, looking sheepish.

"Oh, that's right!" She exclaimed. Her mood shifted as rapidly as her wings and she beamed up at him. "Harry, I have a new job!"

"Let me guess," Harry remarked dryly. "It's something that puts you under some pretty heavy wards."

Cess nodded enthusiastically and launched herself at him. Harry restrained the instinct to bat her away like one do a pesky blowfly or mosquito as she jumped into his thick, messy hair, laughing and jumping like like a child.

"Remind me to have a shower tonight," Harry muttered to Meciél's apparition, who nodded sagely.

"Yes, you should," she murmured, gazing at Cess with detached interest. "Those types are hardly the most cleanest of all Fae. You would not believe some of the places they can get to."

"So, Cess," Harry said loudly, frowning as Cess giggled and spat out a grape seed. It hit him on the nose and bounced off. "Like I've said, I've been trying to call you for ages. I need some help and I'm willing to pay a lot for it."

Cess immediately switched from hyper-activity to shrewd business-fae. Her feet grappled onto some of his bangs and she hung upside from his head, her small face dangling over his right eye. Her eyes were narrowed speculatively and she licked her lips anxiously.

"What type of pay?" she asked suspiciously. "And what do you want?"

"Information," Harry said solemnly. "As for your pay..." He flourished his wand and a plastic bag from within the kitchen zoomed into the living room. It dropped to the ground, revealing a bunch of scattered leaflets and brochures, most featuring some kind of tasty fruit or pastry treat on it. "If you help me, I will get you at least one of every single food on those papers."

"All for me?" Cess asked faintly.

"All for you," Harry promised.

Instead of shrieking in joy as Harry had expected, Cess frowned and bit her lip. Harry watched her trepidation with faint surprise. It wasn't like Cess to pass up such a magnificent price over something so little. The little faery had been passing information to Harry for years now and she had never ever refused one of his bargains.

"What's going on, Cess?" the Denarian asked her. "I'm not asking you to do anything more than you've done before previously."

"I have a new job now, Harry," answered Cess in an uncharacteristically serious voice. "I'm not allowed to get into trouble. She'll do bad things to me if I get in trouble."

"Who's she? What are you doing?" Harry demanded to know.

"Why," came a throaty voice from the other side of the room. "That would be me, little Harry."

Harry's wand was up before he even knew it, the wards awakened and ready to unleash with a mere snap of his fingers. Hellfire raged through him and Meciél's illusion abruptly disappeared as Harry spun around, shock and surprise barely registered in his suddenly tense mind. The sudden movement was enough to loosen Cess' grip on his hair and she went flying through the air with a loud squeal. Harry's lips were pressed firmly together as the Winter Lady Maeve stepped from beyond the Nevernever portal.

Harry hadn't even heard her coming.

He took in her slanted feline eyes, shaded in a green so like his own, and her long glacial-coloured dreadlocks before he snapped his fingers. As Maeve took another step forward, the summoning circle glowed and she was halted by a cylinder of pale blue magic that sprung up around her. Harry tightened his grip on his wand, not at all reassured by Maeve's apparent containment. The summoning circle hadn't been designed to restrain somebody so powerful and he

wouldn't have been surprised if Maeve ripped it apart with a single finger. Still, the Winter Lady seemed content to remain where she was, smiling at Harry and revealing her perfect teeth and thick, red lips. Her tongue darted out to lick them and Harry's heart clenched, before he tore his gaze away from her and reinforced his mental barriers. Maeve was able to throw out illusions and compulsions merely by staring at you.

"Harry," Maeve breathed out and Harry's heart hitched again. The throaty, sensual purr in her voice reminded Harry of some of the better times he had had with Maeve. "Why, Harry, it's so good to see you again."

"Maeve," Harry greeted faintly, still reeling a little over the shock. Nonetheless, his wand was practically vibrating with the amount of Hellfire running through it, ready to amplify the weakest of curses into something that could crush a car by the mere force behind it. "I'll be honest and say I definitely wasn't expecting you."

"They usually aren't." Maeve chuckled. She gestured at the barrier holding her in. "Would you be a dear and release this pesky little spell? I'd like to have a closer look at you."

Not for the first time, Harry cursed Maeve's ability to make every sentence so provocative.

"Let's see now," Harry murmured thoughtfully. "Release the powerful inhuman Faerie from the summoning circle, or leave it in...release...or leave it in...yeah, that's going to be a no, Maeve. You stay where you are."

Maeve stared at him with her soulless eyes and smiled. It wasn't a very nice smile either.

"Fine," she said with a shake of her head.

They both moved at the same time, Maeve and Harry. The former merely raised an arm and brought it down against the barrier, white and blue light springing from her palm of her hand in a devastating blow of force. The latter flicked his wand in a series of movements

and attempted to hold the summoning circle. The white light crackled and flared against the barrier and wind howled within the apartment. Harry's hair and clothes ruffled and billowed out as Harry squinted forward, his wand hissing and steaming as small shards of ice and smoke evaporated as they came close to it. Harry flicked his fingers and glanced up at the roof, which was partially obscured by the miniature snowstorm he had brewing in his living room. The roof glowed, defensive wards shining with a scarlet fire as Harry mentally redirected some of the power to the summoning circle.

It was all for naught. The summoning circle glowed fiercely and wavered as scarlet light twisted and flailed in the intricate runes on the roof, as if it were trying to escape their bounds. With a final flare of light, the summoning circle fell under the whirlwind of Winter power and Harry was forced to stagger backwards. He was already recovering, preparing to unleash the most powerful Word he knew upon her, when Maeve halted and banished away her power with a flick of her hand.

"Halt," she demanded quietly and Harry paused, the Word building up in his throat. There was nothing human on her face as she stared at him icily. "I have not come here to harm you. I give you my oath."

Harry stared at her in surprise.

"Really?" he asked sceptically, although he knew that a Faerie's word was binding. As human as many of them appeared, they lived by another set of rules a code that made them physically incapable of telling a lie.

"Yes," Maeve answered coldly.

"You sure?" Harry asked again, his face screwed up into a frown. "I remember you being kinda pissed off one of the last times we met. Something about a Summer Fae tricking you into giving up your child to me for a few months. I distinctly remember you trying to strangle me. You sure you're not here to finally get your revenge?"

"Yes," Maeve answered anger, although Harry was sure that there was irritation clouding her voice. It was hard to tell with Fae sometimes.

"Ah," Harry uttered and slowly lowered his wand, the word beneath his throat fading away into nothing more than an uncomfortable throb. "Well, why the fuck did you tear through my wards then? And why the hell are you here?"

"Because I felt like it," Maeve answered airily. She brushed her hands on her ripped jeans, torn in all the right places to show just that flash of delicate white skin. Her breasts heaved under her tight white shirt as she smiled at him seductively. "Now that's an interesting combination of spells." She gestured upwards and Harry's gaze followed her hand to the still-glowing runes of his wards. "I've never seen anything quite like them before. Then again," and here she smiled a tad bitterly. "Who are we Fae to study the Wand-Wizards and their ways?"

"Exactly," Harry responded coldly, tucking his wand into his coat and glancing over to where the Sword of the Cross lay on the mantelpiece. It remained still and unmoving, and it was the lack of response that finally clinched it for Harry. "Try to remember that. You're bound by Merlin himself to stay away. I'm a part of that world as well, so I suppose I might be included in that little treaty."

"No, you're not," Maeve answered with a snap, her voice suddenly voice of all human emotion and instead replaced with haunting anger of the Fae. "Those mortal rats who summon upon the Nevernever are fair prey to the higher races. You have summoned us before." Her green eyes flashed malevolently. "You are our prey."

Harry's clenched his fists as he squared his shoulders, refusing to be intimidated.

Maeve suddenly smiled and the tense atmosphere faded away.

"But why am I bantering threats with my old lover?" she murmured smoothly, her voice rich with desire and other throaty emotions once

more. "We're close, you and I, closer than any other human has ever been to me before."

"I've met you, what, six times? It's not like we're soul mates," Harry scoffed, and smirked. "Not like you have a soul though."

"Your wit remains as biting as ever," Maeve murmured with a small smile. "I can see why I was so interested in you."

"Was?" Harry picked up. "Does that mean your paedophile obsession with me has vanished?"

"Oh, you don't need to worry about that," Maeve said dismissively, a mysterious smile briefly fluttering across her face.

"You're a tricky little bitch, aren't you?" Harry snapped.

"Harry, Harry, Harry," Maeve chided. "How could you say that about me in front of our very own union of flesh and blood? Amaris, daughter of Harry Potter, come forward!"

The portal behind Maeve flickered slightly as a dark figure approached it from the other side, obscured by the raging snowstorm. His throat suddenly dry, Harry looked past Maeve as the small, hooded figure walked untouched through the storm and stepped from the Nevernever into his apartment. The first thing Harry noticed were her bare feet, and his eyes travelled upwards, taking in her very form. She had gotten older- Harry still wasn't sure how the time flowed in the Nevernever but it looked like she was twelve or so now, with gleaming dark hair like his own falling to her back. An identical set of green eyes to his own stared back at him as Amaris Potter lowered her hood, bowing her head.

"Hello, Father," she greeted quietly, but without emotion.

"Amaris," Harry let out in a grated whisper. Something tugged within him but Harry brushed the emotion away, steeling himself with a breath and trying to distance himself. His lips quirked up into a roguish smile as he raised a hand in greeting. "What have you been up to, brat?"

"Have I done wrong?" asked Amaris with faintest echoes of confusion. A second later, she forestalled Harry by nodding. "Ah. Yes. That's right. You use human terminology referring to naughty and disobedient children as a form of affection. As for my activities, Mother recently taught me how to kill small human children with nothing but my mind."

"Yep," Harry deadpanned. "She's definitely Amaris."

"Mistress!"

Cess, who had been cowering in the corner in a vain attempt to hide from Maeve, fluttered up and shot towards Amaris at blinding speed. Harry and Maeve watched as the small fae dug into Amaris's hair and nestled against the long, dark locks. Amaris raised a small hand and carefully pet Cess on the head, something like affection flickering in her eyes. Harry watched the display with nothing short of surprise and turned back to Maeve with a bemused expression.

"Cess is my daughter's pet?"

"They 'bonded' over their knowledge of you, surprisingly," Maeve answered with a cruel twist of her lips. "So I arranged for the little pest to join us in my fortress. It's the least a mother could do for her daughter."

"I'm sure she's touched," Harry uttered sarcastically. He smiled thinly. "How is your fortress, by the way? The last I saw, somebody was huffing and puffing and throwing fucking fireballs at it."

"That matter has been taken care of," Maeve said evasively. "But that reminds me, there is still something I need to take care of."

"Oh? And what's that?" Harry pressed. He squirmed on his feet and edged away as Maeve strolled towards him, a very beautiful smile on her face. "Oi, what are..."

His words faded away and an unwilling gasp escaped his lips as Maeve reached out and stroked the side of his face gently. Her sharp

nails, sharp enough to drawn blood, scraped against his skin in such a way that only maximised the blissful sensations coursing through him. Some of it was definitely part of her prowess, but Harry felt it was safe to say that the rest of her was just her sex appeal. Pleasure clouded his mind, his body tenses, pupils dilating and blood racing. For a single moment, Harry was more aroused than he had ever been in his entire life. Then it all came down with a crashing halt as Meciél reared herself within his mind, her presence flooding through his senses, snapping the delicate threads and weaves of glamours and foreign emotions. The pleasure died down and suddenly Maeve's stroking hand was simply a brush against the cheek.

Maeve's desired-filled expression didn't change at all as Harry's wand jammed against her stomach. She strolled around him, as if ignorant at how easily Harry could kill at that moment. Powerful or not, there were not many creatures that could survive a full-forced blast at that range. Her hand came up again and Harry and Meciél both fought against the pleasure-filled sensations as she brushed against his thigh. Harry swallowed, his voice dry and sounding rather small to his ears.

"If you do that again, I'll kill you," he promised.

Maeve's hand halted and her face took a look of disappointment.

"Oh, Harry," she sighed. "We could have had such fun."

"Not without a price," Harry whispered. His body was flushed and tense and so very hot, but he ignored the urges as Meciél continued to defend him from the unending bombardment of glamours and illusions that Maeve was giving him. True to her word, they weren't hurting him but there was no way that Harry wanted to get into that situation again. Well, he wanted to, that was painfully aware to anybody in the room. (Harry suddenly realised that his daughter's eyes were fixated on his erection and adjusted himself, a muttered curse escaping his lips). His common sense was just had a little more priority than his wants. "And...I will not...discharge...the debt that easily."

Maeve halted, her expression unreadable as Harry grinned at her viciously.

"Oh yes," he crowed. "I know what you were trying to do. I saved your life and you owe me big. Well, it's going to take more than some sex for you to get off that easily."

"What do you want?" Maeve asked. She was emotionless, all the desire washed out of her in an instant as if she had just turned off a switch.

'Amaris!'

"Amaris," Harry and Meciél answered as one, glancing at the little twelve-year-old.

"No," Maeve shot back instantly. She smiled chillingly. "Amaris is my daughter, little Denarian. I claimed her in a bargain from you- your first born. She's too expensive."

"Your life is worth less than your daughter's?" Harry asked and scoffed. "I didn't know you were such a mother."

"The firstborn of a wizard, the host of a Denarian Lord and a Knight of the Cross to boot, is far more valuable than you realise," Maeve answered, her eyes glowing with Winter. The temperature in the room seemed to dip a few degrees. "Her soul is ours. Half-human and half-Fae, the moment she chooses to fully embrace her Fae side, she will forfeit her soul and it's power and purity will become a most exquisite boon. You, little boy, cannot afford her. You could save my life a hundred times and the Winter Court would still refuse. She is beyond your reach for now."

Her words hit Harry and inspired a fury that surprised even him. He hadn't known he was so attached to the little brat. Meciél seemed to react much like him, her emotions a tangled mess as old and new aches and pains seeped from her presence. A moment later, Harry was ablaze with Hellfire, the fiery power surging through him. He was barely aware of his eyes darkening as they wreathed with flames or

the temperature, which Maeve had chilled, going up by ten degrees in a second.

"Fine then," Harry spat out in anger, his face twisted up into a furious scowl. "Then I'll get what I came for. I want information, Maeve. Everything you know about the Blackened Order of the Denarius and it's members." He took a step forward, his eyes practically glowing, and Maeve took a step back, her eyes glittering dangerously but reluctantly falling back as Harry continued. "I want base locations, member movements, rundown of abilities and powers, likes, hates, favourite colour- everything! I want you to spend the next seven days finding me everything I want to know!"

Harry slammed a hand on the wall behind Maeve and leaned in close to her ear, ignoring the decaying stench of Winter that arose from Maeve's highly desirable form.

"Is that too expensive, Maeve?" he hissed coldly. "Or isn't your life worth some measley information?"

"Knowledge is power, especially to our kind," Maeve answered back, her voice barely a whisper in her fury. "But it is acceptable."

The Fae did not like to be spurned. Of all the human emotions they tried to mimic, it was pride that they took to best.

Anything resembling a human being had left her, human emotion, a human mind, a human heart. She strode around Harry effortlessly and stalked to the portal. "Your price has been named and so mote it be. I shall pay back my debt and then we shall have no further dealings, child. Should we meet again after this, however, I may decide to crush you." Her voice dripped with venom. "Remember that."

Maeve paused by Amaris and something was exchanged between them. Without another word, Maeve approached the portal and walked through it, instantly disappearing in the fierce snowstorm that raged within the Nevernever. At once, it was like a suppressive atmosphere had disappeared and Harry unconsciously let out a deep breath. The Hellfire was simmering down now and he raked a hand

through his hair, gazing at Amaris with an emotion even he couldn't identify.

"Amaris," he said quietly.

Amaris was stroking Cess as she cupped the small Fae in her hands, her serious green eyes staring up at her father. Without another word, she turned around and approached the portal. She hesitated at the precipice and, without turning around, spoke up, her quiet voice echoing in the suddenly silent apartment.

"Father," she murmured and Harry was stunned by the emotion behind it. She sounded more human than she ever had, almost desperate and sad. "You should not...try to contact me again. I advise you to forget about me. There will be other children."

"You're my first," Harry said, a ghost of a smile flickering on his face. "You know what they say about your first."

"No, I don't," Amaris responded quietly and Harry gave out a low chuckle.

"Amaris..." he began.

"It isn't safe," Amaris whispered.

Harry didn't know if that sounded like a warning or a plea. Amaris clearly wanted to say something else, but she hesitated and her small shoulders slumped. As she moved to enter the portal, Harry took a quick step forward and stretched out with his hand. His fingers brushed against her silky hair and her head turned. Harry met his daughter's eyes for a split-second, before she too disappeared through the portal to join her mother. Harry just stood there as the portal snapped shut with a slight hiss, his hand still outstretched, before he lowered his limb and sighed regretfully. As he stood there, Meciél began to speak, her voice oddly subdued.

'Amaris is a changeling, the spawn of a Fae and a human. When the time comes, she will have to choose between her human and her Fae side. If she chooses her human side, she forfeits any claim she may

have had towards the power of Winter but gains a full soul. If she chooses her Fae side, she loses her soul and will become just like them. She will not longer be our daughter.'

"I'm not going to let her go with her bitch of a mother," Harry said quietly. His jaw was set in determination and his fingernails were clenched so tightly into his palms that they were drawing blood. "I don't know what type of person I am to be a father. I don't even know if I want to be a father. But I won't let her stay there."

'You really have grown up, haven't you?' Meciél sounded proud.

"Well, what can I say?" Harry shrugged. "The little brat has somehow grown on me and suddenly, I really, really don't want her to become like her mother. Not when she's..." he trailed off with a sigh.

'Just remember, my beloved: she may already be lost to us. She has been conditioned from birth to accept her mother's family as her own.'

"I don't think so," Harry murmured and began cleaning up the left-over fruit and yogurt off the ground. "Because I've never met a Fae whose eyes could tear up like that."

Meciél was silent.

A/N: I'll lay it down for the record. The Denarian Lord is the last of the Denarian Trilogy. You know, because it's Book 3 and all. I've had a few people at DLP whisper about another one to the newbies. Sadly, this is it, folks. Afterwards, I'll probably finish the RoA sequel and then- well, it might be time for me to drop out of the Fanfiction game.

A massive thanks to the following people at DLP who proof-read this chapter.

- Chime??
- Lord Xantam
- The Darlm
- KrazQ
- Dragonrider Novera
- Zyloch

It was a pity that there was so much work for them. I thought I'd done a decent job this time.

The first thing that Harry noticed when he opened his eyes was that the roof was on fire. He stared at it unblinkingly, his mind trying to play a little catch up as he lay on the cold, hard ground. A shadow loomed above him, blocking out the lamps that hung from the walls, and Harry flickered his gaze to the right as a purple-robed wizard with an extremely long beard and a pair of half-moon glasses raised his wand. The old man's mouth moved but Harry couldn't hear what he said. He couldn't hear much of anything, actually. His ears throbbed painfully and it sounded like somebody had set off an alarm in his head, blocking out anything from the outside world with a mixture of piercing screeches and static fuzz. He watched as the elderly wizard conjured a flock of birds made entirely out of sparkling water and flew them to the small patches of fire eating away at the wooden beams. His mind was moving at a sluggish pace and he thought he could hear voices, soft feminine voices, as he tried to remember the man's name. He looked hauntingly familiar, with those twinkling blue eyes

and that blackened, dead hand. Dudders...Dumb...Dumbarse? Dumbshit? Dumble-elevator? Harry paused. That last one even sounded ridiculous to , he knew it had something to do with elevators. Lift? Shaft? Floors? Buildings? Buttons? Cheesy music? Dumble-cheesy music?

The man was kneeling beside Harry now, his brows furrowed. With a wave of his wand, he sprayed a trail of golden lights of Harry, obviously understanding the different displays of colour and light that hovered over him. The man tapped Harry on the head, frowned, and moved his wand to his ears. Harry watched in bemusement, idly noting that his legs seemed to be broken. Still, his mind was trailing behind his body by about two kilometres, so all he could feel was a warm haze. If his legs truly were broken, well, he'd worry about them when he'd caught up a little. For now, he'd just lay back and enjoy the...

Something in his ears broke and Harry let out an agonising scream. His legs curled up and his hands flew to his ears, clutching them tightly as waves of pain shot through his head. He never felt the second wand tap, but he felt the broken parts in his ear come together again as the pain stopped. Along with the pain went the alarms and static buzz, replaced with the refreshing sound of rustling robes and his own beating heart.

"That fucking hurt!" he gasped out loud.

"My apologies, Harry," the old man said quietly, withdrawing his wand and standing up. He offered Harry a hand, who took it and allowed the purple-robed wizard to lead him to a quaint little armchair that had suddenly popped up out of nowhere. "It appears that the backlash had a significantly negative affect on your auditory senses."

"Right," Harry said dazedly, slumping against the chair and looking as bewildered as he felt. "That's me. Harry. Harry. Hareeeee. Hairy Harry? No, just Harry. Harry, Harry, Harry." He paused and plucked his lips. "Bob." He clicked his tongue and chuckled weakly. "What a funny name. Bob. Who would call somebody Bob? Do you know somebody named Bob, Dumble-knob?"

"I'm afraid I don't," the old man said slowly, eying Harry with ill-disguised concern. "Although, I do recall that my birth certificate says 'Albus Dumbledore'. Well, I will admit that there are a plenitude of middle names, each stranger than the last, but I do not believe we really want to go there."

"Why, is it bad weather?" Harry retorted instantly and let out a loud giggle. He paused in mid-laugh and snapped his fingers, his eyes widening with comprehension. "Of course!" He exclaimed. "All elevators have doors and all doors have knobs!"

"I see," Dumbledore murmured softly, stroking his beard. He tapped the strangely restrained Harry on the head with his wand and frowned. "Oh dear. There's a slight chance that you may have suffered the tiniest bit of a little brain damage. That backlash truly did rattle your mind a little, didn't it? Well, I suppose we should be grateful that there aren't any physical side-effects. Why, I once knew a man who attempted to learn this very Art. His backlash turned him into the strangest shade of puce."

The Headmaster appeared a little pensive as he scratched his chin. "I wonder what ever happened to him? The last I heard, he had joined a muggle carnival. He always did have an unduly fascination with flashing lights..."

Harry was too busy gagging to answer. There was something in his stomach that was demanding to get out. With a series of undignified hacks, Harry threw back his head and vomited out a steam of steamy, green slime all over the floor of Dumbledore's office. The man in question took a step backwards, eying the pile of steamy goo critically while Harry cocked his head, staring at it as if it were the most fascinating thing in the world.

"I suppose discounting physical symptoms might have been a tad hasty..." Dumbledore amended carefully.

He was cut off Harry's stomach rumbled again and only just avoided the next pile of steaming goo that left Harry's mouth. It really was quite the odd physiological backlash. Perhaps the Word originated from a world full of this type of substance- whatever it was. A swipe of

his wand took care of the smell, although he left the goo there for further study, while Harry stared down at the quivering masses of whatever-the-hell they were and frowned.

"Why green, Dumbledore?" he inquired, puzzled and confused. "Why is it green? Why not red? Red's a good colour. I'd even go so far as to say that red's a great colour. Great, awesome, fantastic, superb!"

Dumbledore ignored him, staring down intently into Harry's eyes as if they held all the mysteries of the universe in them. Harry was drawn to his captivating blue eyes as if he were in a trance and suddenly found that he couldn't move his head- no, his entire body had gone stiff. He sat there, frozen, as Albus's eyes seemed to bore into his head. The old man opened his mouth, his voice strangely distant and hypnotic.

"Meciel?" the venerable wizard called softly. "Can you hear me? I need to know if you will be able to fix this damage to Harry's mind."

A blaze of searingly familiar heat pooled behind his eyes. His blood surged with something and his entire body suddenly felt better, as if he were a sprinter taking the first drink of water after the race. Whatever it was that Dumbledore saw, it seemed to leave him satisfied and he lent back. Harry suddenly found that his body could move again and exhaled noisily, waving his arms in the air as he tested out his newly-found freedom. Dumbledore sighed and sat down in an armchair of his own, a smile twisting his face up into an expression of wryness.

"Well, Harry." Dumbledore coughed. "At least you are in relatively good health. Learning the Word is not an easy task, even for one with your unique capabilities. Trust me when I say that it could have been much worse."

"Dumbledore?" Harry asked curiously. He was fidgeting in his seat, squirming like a small child as his eyes roved over the room, taking in everything with an unnatural degree of fascination.

"Yes, Harry?"

"What's Meciél?" Harry asked innocently.

Dumbledore was silent, clearly taking his time and pondering the answer.

"Meciél is... a friend," he answered at last. "She will help you."

"Oh," Harry uttered. He was silent for a few more moments. "Dumbledore? Who are you again?"

"I'm Albus Dumbledore," Dumbledore answered slowly.

"And I'm..." Harry trailed off expectantly.

"You're Harry Potter," Dumbledore answered with a resigned sigh. Oh dear, it did look like he would be at this for a while, at least. "Do you remember that? Your name?"

"Harry," Harry repeated softly. He perked up and a ear-splitting grin crossed his face. "That's me. Harry. Harry. Hareeeee. Hairy Harry? No, just Harry. Harry, Harry, Harry." He paused and plucked his lips. "Bob." He clicked his tongue and chuckled weakly. "What a funny name. Bob. Who would call somebody Bob? Do you know somebody named Bob?"

Dumbledore rubbed the bridge of his nose while Harry frowned.

"Say, are you going to eat that?" Harry demanded and pointed.

Dumbledore followed the arm to the steamy piles of green goo on his floor and stared back at Harry.

"Am I going to eat that small pile of goo-vomit on the ground here?" He repeated carefully.

"Are you?" Harry prodded.

"No," Dumbledore answered with a short shake of his head. His beard quivered, perhaps out of suppressed mirth, and his eyes

twinkled. "I do not believe that you should- ah...oh dear. Now you've gone and made a mess of yourself, Harry."

"Who's Harry?"

"You are."

"Ah, that's right. I'm Harry. Hairy Haree Harry. Am I Hairy? No, not so Hairy. I could be Hairy. Can I make myself Hairy?"

Thirty minutes later, a disgruntled, embarrassed but relatively normal Harry Potter found himself sprawled in one of the chairs to Dumbledore's office- the small room they had been practising in absolutely reeking in a way that not even Dumbledore's charms could entirely fix. It had only been a couple of days since his meeting with Maeve and he had arrived at Hogwarts around lunchtime to practise his Words yet again. This time though he had made a small mistake and well, Harry distinctly recalled eating a pile of his own goo-like vomit so it had fucked his head over pretty badly. His body was still throbbing and he found that he had a small tendency to zone in and out of conversations, but Meciél had assured him that it was a temporary problem and it was probably good that Harry's mind wasn't running as efficiently as it could. After all, he had nearly blown it up when he had botched up that one syllable in the newest of Words he had been learning and it did need time to recover all of its neural pathways, or whatever the hell Meciél had been going on about. Her cool tones came off almost as annoying as Dumbledore's patience or the portrait's muttering. Added to that the stress of meeting Maeve two days ago and the nighttime searches for the Order of the Blackened Denarius, and Harry found himself with a whopper of a headache.

Fuck, his head hurt.

"It could have been worse," Dumbledore said quietly, his fingers pressed together sagely as he observed Harry from the other side of his desk. His eyes were twinkling just a tad too brightly in Harry's opinion, and he resisted the urge to growl at the old wizard. "It could have been much worse," Dumbledore continued and there was something haunted about his gaze, his eyes distant as if staring at an

event playing out before him long, long ago. "Trust me on this. You got off rather lightly."

"Your face could have been worse as well," Harry practically snarled, then winced as a lance of pain shot through his head. He clutched his forehead, hissing with the type of anger that only appeared with pain that demanded the destruction of anything or anyone nearby. Harry mostly restrained this particular anger, although his leg lashed out and slammed into Dumbledore's wooden desk. The wood cracked and Harry chuckled grimly. "Good. I shouldn't be the only one who feels like this."

"We'll ignore that my desk, while old, isn't exactly the most intellectual of inanimate objects, shall we?" Dumbledore murmured with a light chuckle, stroking his quivering beard.

"Funny," Harry said with gritted teeth. "Is there anything you want, or can I go now?"

Dumbledore's twinkle faded and he suddenly looked a little older and more tired than he had before. There was also a certain grimness about him as he reached into one of the many stacks of parchments and scrolls that lay scattered on his long desk. At Harry's inquisitive look, he smiled slightly and gestured at the paperwork before him.

"The Ministry has a new Minister of Magic," Dumbledore clarified. "Although he has a certain disdain for me, it does not stop him from sending me reports and asking for advice on anything that suits him. I suppose he figures that there will be something in here that he might miss, not that he would ever admit it to the public, of course. For Minister Scrimgeour, if there is anything more important than the destruction of Lord Voldemort, it is upholding the perfect public persona of the Ministry of Magic."

"Scrimgeour?" Harry repeated doubtfully, then shrugged. "Ah well, I suppose it's better than 'Fudge.' Seriously, who names an entire family line after a type of cake?"

Dumbledore chuckled, then grew serious as he found the scroll he wanted. He unravelled it before Harry's eyes and reviewed the

information again. Harry shifted in his seat impatiently, but his keen eyes made out the grubby fingerprints on the wrinkled parchment of the scroll. Dumbledore had looked at this quite a few times beforehand, it seemed. His eyes glanced away, roving around Dumbledore's spacious office. Meciél's illusion was currently strolling around in her white and silver wand-wizard robes, glancing at some of the book titles with interest. He couldn't see them from where he was sitting but he could feel the itching behind his eyes, knowing that she was using his sight to read them even from all the way across the room. Was it a bad thing if she had better control over his body than he did? It could have been worse, he supposed. He could be wearing glasses like he did when he was young. Now THAT would have been a severe weakness in his line of work.

He glanced away from Meciél, mostly to annoy her, and looked over on the wall. Many of the portraits of past Headmasters were snoozing in their frames, and only a few were eying Harry and Dumbledore with curiosity. By now, they had gotten used to Harry ducking in once or twice a week for a meeting. Harry was pretty sure that Dumbledore hadn't let them know exactly what type of training he was receiving—the Words of Worlds was one of the most demanding and powerful studies of magic and one loose tongue could have bought a lot of trouble down on the elderly Headmaster. It was probably illegal or something, Harry had deduced, although it wasn't like the Ministry could do anything about it. This was Dumbledore and as much as the man irked Harry at times with his naive notions of innocence and peace, the Denarian would freely admit that there was no other wizard that he respected more. After all, they had fought together side by side and spilled blood for the same cause. What greater bond existed?

There was also the fact that Dumbledore could probably hand Harry's arse to him on a silver platter if he so chose to, though Harry thought he'd give the old bastard a fight for his money if it ever came down to that.

It would probably be kinda fun too.

"-arry? Can you hear me?"

"What?" Harry jerked himself out his stupor and blinked rapidly. "I...yeah, I'm alright."

"Are you sure?" asked Dumbledore in concern. He dropped the scroll and stared at Harry carefully. "I can postpone this for a short while, if you want me to."

"Nah, nah, I'm good, I'm good," Harry waved him off. "Go on. What can little old me do for the great and vaunted Order of Phoenix?"

"It's quite simple, I suppose," Dumbledore answered after a moment's hesitation. He paused, glancing sideways at the portraits and Harry followed his gaze. They were all gone, probably ordered to disperse by some nonverbal command by Dumbledore. Whatever it was he was about to say, the Headmaster didn't want any witnesses. "Harry, I would like you to do me a favour."

"What type of favour?" Harry asked suspiciously.

To somebody who so obviously had a foot in the Summer Court of the Fae, a favour when properly worded could be nothing short of a trap. Harry's eyes slid to Fawkes's empty perch and scoffed to himself silently. Perhaps the Summer Fae were not as cruel as their Winter ilk (he doubted anybody could be more of a bitch than Maeve was) but they were just as inhuman. Had Amaris' mother been a Summer Fae, Harry had no doubt that he'd be facing the same problem as he did now. The thought of Amaris made him grimace. The little brat had grown on him and his determination to remove her from the 'care' of her mother hadn't lessened in the few days since their meeting. Harry wondered if that had been Fawkes' doing when the Summer Fae had demanded that Amaris stay with him for the rest of the school year- the power of love and all that crap.

Did Fawkes actually care in her own twisted way (something both Harry and Meciél doubted), or was she just playing the Fae game and trying to piss off her rival? There was some definite history between Fawkes and Maeve and Harry suspected that Dumbledore had something to do with it. It was strange, now that he thought about it. The Wand-Wizarding World was meant to be off-limits to the Fae, so

how had a Summer Fae attached herself to one of the most prominent wand-wizards ever to be born?

"Did you hear me, Harry?"

"Hmm, what?" Harry murmured, then growled and slapped himself on the head. "Right. Favour. Gotcha. Damn, that Word messed me up more than all the pot I've ever smoked." He paused at Dumbledore's look and backpedaled. "Not that I've ever done drugs before, of course. Brutal murders and ritual sacrifices are one things, but drugs? That's almost as bad as alcohol and underage sex? Oh...wait..."

"I want you to kill somebody for me."

Harry jerked and stared at Dumbledore in utter surprise. There was nothing like that particular sentence to get one's mind focused. To his credit, Dumbledore looked extremely calm about it. Even Harry's advanced senses couldn't pick up an increased heart rate coming from the bearded wizard, who stared back at Harry calmly, as if talking about nothing more important about than the weather.

"What?"

"I believe you heard me this time," Dumbledore answered dryly and steeped his fingers together. He peered at Harry over his glasses, his twinkle and good humour noticeably absent. "There is a man who is detrimental to our cause. He must die."

Harry gauged Dumbledore for a few more moments and then let a dark smile cross his face.

"Shit! Dumbledore, I didn't know you had it in you!" Harry exclaimed eagerly. He leaned forward and thumped his hand on Dumbledore's desk. "It's about damn time too. See, this was what I was talking about when I said I'd work for the Order. Killing and all that good stuff! Lets knock off some of Voldemort's supporters. It's one less Death Eater we have to kill when he makes his move."

Dumbledore remained calm and emotionless, not even batting an eyebrow at Harry's exuberant behaviour. He handed Harry the scroll

he had just been reading and sat back as Harry glanced over it once, allowing Meciél to memorise and distribute the necessary details to him.

"Lucius Malfoy, son of Abraxas Malfoy of the Noble Malfoy lineage," Meciél's apparition said casually, strolling over from the bookcase. "Born in 1954...suspected of Death Eater activities as early as 1972, suspected of funding and hosting Death Eater activities as early as 1977, arrested, tried and released in 1981. Caught in the Department of Mysteries in early 1996, arrested and sent to Azkaban a week later. Has contributed tens of thousands of galleons, funded conservative political parties, and has had the ear of every major politician for the last ten years. He's the head of a family owned business, has shares and investments tied up that are worth quite a lot of gold...a net capital of approximately 672 thousand galleons. He's quite rich, isn't he?"

"Malfoy..." Harry frowned. "Any relation to the little blonde dickweed that goes to school here? The one whose face I bashed in more than once."

"His father."

"The stern Headmaster, disappointed in his student's academic results, resorts to assassination in order to pass on the educational message. Do your homework, bitch!" Harry snickered.

Dumbledore ignored Harry's humour and folded his hands on his lap. "Lucius," he began. "is a very slippery individual. His connections are high and the Malfoy gold runs deep." He lent back in his chair, exhaling quietly. "Deep enough to get him out of Azkaban. It is deep enough that he is shortly to be released from Azkaban, pending another trial. Apparently the Warlock that presided over his case was found to be in possession of some very powerful mind-altering potions, powerful enough that every trial he has presided over in the past six months has been declared as mistrials."

"Cunning," Harry said with an approving nod. "That's pretty cool."

"This may be the word of Lord Voldemort or it may simply be by Lucius using some blackmail material or some other type of coercion in the right places," Dumbledore continued. "The means matter not. Lucius Malfoy cannot be allowed to escape Azkaban for even a single day. Not only is he a moderately skilled wizard but his influence runs deep into the Ministry. If he is allowed to resume his place of power, no matter how stained his reputation, then he may undo whatever good Minister Scrimgeour has done in a single day, merely with a whispered word and the clanking of gold."

"Oh," Harry said, and his enthusiasm was slightly dampened. "It's a political thing."

Dumbledore arched an eyebrow.

"I don't like politics," Harry elaborated. "They're..." he fumbled for words. "They're confusing and annoying. You gotta think three different ways and play the crowd and...well, it's just a helluva lot easier blowing them all up with some fire. Still, you're the boss, aren't you? You want Malfoy gone, then he's gone. Where's he now?"

"Azkaban," Dumbledore answered quietly.

"Ooh," Harry breathed out with a wince. He scratched his head awkwardly. "Azkaban? Big prison with those daemon-spawn guards? The impenetrable Azkaban?"

"Not so impenetrable now," Dumbledore said grimly. "It seems that prison breaks these days are quite common. The Ministry of Magic is being very quiet about it, but Lord Voldemort has returned to Azkaban and finished what he started last year. Most of his Death Eaters have escaped, flocking once more to their master's side. Lucius remained behind, although his motives are quite obvious."

"Why break down the door when you can get it opened on the other side?" Harry offered and Dumbledore nodded. "Still, it's going to take a bit of work to break into that place."

"I wouldn't recommend it," Meciél murmured airily. Her silver gaze was fixated on Dumbledore- she seemed to be doing that quite a lot

lately, now that he thought about it. "But I wouldn't worry. Albus here has a plan." She smiled mysteriously. "Men of his ilk usually do."

"Yeah, prob- wait!" Harry cut himself off mid sentence and turned to Meciell's apparition under the bemused gaze of Dumbledore. "Albus?" he demanded incredulity. "You call him 'Albus'?"

"Of course I do, my beloved," Meciell answered, staring at Harry with an amused tilt of her lips. She reached out and smoothed back his hair, or so Harry perceived, and lent down to his ear. "You might be surprised to learn, but 'Albus' is his name."

"I know that!" Harry snapped, annoyed at Meciell's smile. "My brain's not completely fried just yet. I just didn't know you were on a first name basis with him." He paused and glanced at Dumbledore. "Eh, c'mon, it's kinda true. You are old."

"No offence taken," Dumbledore said merrily. He appeared glad that the discussion had turned to other things if the increasing twinkle in his eye had anything to say about it. "I am old, after all, and it is not the first time somebody called me a codger. Why, I believe just yesterday a Slytherin Prefect was telling a group of second years that I was a 'doddering and barmy old muggle-loving fool'. Or so the Fat Friar led me to believe- he is quite the gossip for somebody of his age. His deathday was just the other week, too. Seven hundred and sixty-four years of death."

"Right," Harry said after a moment's pause. "Anyway...Azkaban?"

"It has been arranged," Dumbledore said, all levity from his face gone in a flash. "Auror Shackelbolt has made all the necessary details. All you must do is arrive at Grimmauld Place at around 6pm tonight- no later- and we will go through it in more detail where it is not as...ah, welcome back, Phineas. Is everything as it should be?"

"There are easier ways of getting me out of the office than sending me out on an errand, Dumbledore," one of the portraits grumbled, arriving back in his frames in a bustle of movement.

Harry glanced up to see a sharp-eyed wizard staring down at him speculatively and with no small amount of disdain.

"Finished your little session with your boy, Dumbledore?" he asked snidely. "I always knew you were into the young ones."

"Oi, you fuckhead!" Harry snapped, narrowing his eyes and glaring at the portrait. "Wanna say that again? No, wait!" Harry paused and snapped his fingers. With a dark smile, Hellfire slowly blossomed into his open palm, bringing with it the surging emotions that had got him hooked so long ago. Channelling Hellfire without a wand was extremely difficult, especially in larger quantities, but Harry was particularly skilled with his use of the Dark Flame. "Okay, let's redo that." He brandished the ball of sulphur-reeking flame in his hand menacingly. "Wanna say that again?"

"Dumbledore!" Phineas hissed from his portrait, his eyes wide. "Your dog is off it's leash."

"Dog?" Harry repeated incredulously. "Okay, now you're going to burn!"

"That is enough, Phineas!" Dumbledore said firmly. His voice wasn't particularly loud but it shot through the room like a whip crack as the Headmaster stood up, eying the portrait disapprovingly. "Contrary to your beliefs, Harry here is his own man. Hence, if he tries to destroy you, I may not be able to stop him by any means other than a wand and, believe me Phineas, you do not want me to go down that road." Dumbledore placed his hands on his desk and leaned forward ominously, eying the portrait seriously. "I just may lose."

Phineas was quiet for a moment. Then, without so much as another word, he left. Harry dispelled the Hellfire in his hand and turned a very satisfied smirk onto a suddenly weary Dumbledore.

"Might lose, eh?" he asked cockily.

"Dramatic effect has a way of clearing one's ego especially that of a man as vain as Phineas..." Dumbledore started to explain, but Harry cut him off with a wagging finger and an ever-increasing smile.

"Nope!" he said cheerfully. "For the sake of my ego, I'm going to pretend that it's true. Harry Potter, better than Dumbledore!" He ended his sentence with a flourish of his hand and cocked his head. "Catchy, no?"

Dumbledore just looked exasperated.

"Oh, just go already," he grumbled good-naturedly. "You seem to be quite capable of giving me a headache."

"Ah!" Harry declared in triumph. "The battle begins."

Meciel watched the interaction between the two powerful wizards and said nothing.

After a few more moments of posturing, Harry left Dumbledore's office and began to make his way through the halls of Hogwarts. It was a Saturday, so they were relatively empty. Most of them had probably headed off for the village- Harry knew he would if he had been cooped up in these walls for two months. His mind distracted and still recovering from the mental backlash of the misspoken Word, he almost didn't hear the soft footsteps that were coming up behind him. He didn't move, didn't reach for his wand or make any acknowledgement that he knew somebody was there. Instead, as he walked, he slowly allowed Hellfire to seep into him, energising his muscles and limbs and preparing himself to smash an enemy into the ground. With his luck, it'd probably be the junior Malfoy. Then again, Harry would just have to laugh at the irony if it was him.

Finally, tensed and ready, Harry waited for a lapse in the footsteps as they came closer and closer. He could hear the person's heart beating and the exhaled breaths- it was a female and she sounded excited? Was Voldemort employing teenage girls as assassins now? As the unknown girl got closer and closer, Harry finally sprung into action. He spun around, his left hand coming up and weaving invisible defensive magic to block any attack, his right hand slamming forward, intent on driving into the face of...Amanda?

"Hi, Harry!" Amanda chirped, before her eyes widened in horror.

Harry's left hand shot out and clashed with the Hellfire in his right. A great shudder ran through his body as he forcibly pulled back, diverting the attack. He lost his balance and, as he stumbled, slammed the Hellfire-encased fist into the nearby wall. A loud crack shot down the corridor. The walls rumbled, bits of stone and dirt falling off them as the Hellfire ripped through them. The damage was localised and rather small, but there was a basketball-sized groove where he had hit the wall when Harry pulled his hand back. He looked at the damage and winced, glancing around to make sure that nobody else was there. A nearby portrait was staring at them with horror and he stared back evenly.

"Er...she did it!" Harry lied, pointing at the shocked blonde girl standing before him. "I saw her do it with my own two eyes!"

Amanda's mouth opened in protest but Harry hastily shoved a hand over it and, gripping her arm, dragged her away from the scene of the crime.

"Well, you almost got completely fucked up," Harry told her cheerfully. "Well done!"

"What the hell was that for?" Amanda demanded, throwing Harry's hand off her mouth and glaring at him indignantly.

"What was that for?" Harry demanded. "Somebody sneaks up to me and you're surprised I don't think there an assassin?" He paused thoughtfully, scratching his chin and his eyes gazing upwards "Then again, it would be a bit strange to have a teenage female as an assassin. Although, it might have been a stalker. Am I against stalkers? Well, I suppose it depends if they're hot..."

"Hello?" Amanda called out, waving a hand in front of his face. He blinked and looked down at her. "Who are you talking to? And it's not a stalker, it's me!"

"Right, right," Harry said quickly. "Yes, you. You're...?"

"Amanda!"

"Amanda! That's the name!" Harry crowed and snapped his fingers. "The little blonde bint...yeah, it's all coming back to me!"

"Harry, are you okay?" Amanda asked. She peered at him in concern. "You're not acting like...well, a complete bastard. It's kinda strange."

"Just a bit of brain damage. Something up there exploded or something... I dunno. It's all good though, Meciell's doing her bit and knitting everything back together," Harry explained, tapping his head for emphasis. Abruptly, his mood changed, as if he had flicked a switch, and an annoyed frown crossed his face. "Oh, Amanda. It's you. What do you want?"

Amanda was staring at him and Harry took the time to stare back at her. Perhaps his memories were a little fuzzy, but it struck him at that moment on just how hot Amanda was. In fact, if he aged her a decade or two, then it was almost like she was the sister of Charity Carpenter. He supposed it was the blonde hair. Blonde hair did do it for him at times. Then again, Meciell's hair was black; a type of glittering black that shone in the light, whilst Maeve's hair was a mixture of blue, green and white shades that, on paper, sounded appalling but worked very well for her, and those two were the most beautiful women he had ever seen. Maybe it was her rack. Harry's gaze fixated downwards and he grinned at her lecherously. Maybe it was the whole school uniform thing she had going for her...

"Hey!" Amanda snapped, waving her hands in front of Harry's face. "I know I'm unbelievably sexy, but perhaps you shouldn't stare in a public place. If you're that desperate, I can give you a signed photo."

Harry blinked and stared at her. Then, frowning, he reached out and sharply flicked her on the forehead. Amanda recoiled with a loud yelp, rubbing her forehead with a pout.

"Don't...just don't act like me," Harry commanded and he stared a strangely-bold Amanda down.

Finally, Amanda blushed and her grey eyes darted away from his gaze. Harry watched her with annoyance as she fiddled with her hands and grinned.

"There we are," he said cheerfully. "Little, meek, Amanda, knowing her place."

Amanda's head shot upwards and her eyes narrowed as Harry stared down at her.

"So," Harry continued dryly. "Was there anything you wanted, apart from staring at your long-time crush, first-time lover?"

"Oh, right," Amanda said and her challenging look disappeared. She ducked her head and when her expression was properly submissive and polite, she raised it. "Harry. I want to ask you for a favour."

"Everybody does, apparently, but okay, Amanda," Harry said smoothly. He grabbed her hands and smiled as she started, her eyes wide. "I will take your sacred virginity and, if you so please, I will use your virgin blood and sacrifice it to my dark gods. Well, goddesses. Eh, there's really only one."

In his head, Meciél harrumphed.

"No!" Amanda practically shrieked, her cheeks suffusing with blood. Harry couldn't tell if it was anger or embarrassment, although it might have been both. "I want you to teach me again!"

"Oh," Harry uttered, looking disappointed. "Well, in that case—um...No."

"What? Why not?"

"Because I don't want to?"

"Honestly, we go through this every time I ask you," Amanda snapped. "Can't we just skip it already? I humbly ask. You refuse. I ask again. You refuse. I imply that you might be able to corrupt me,

mention the fact that my dad would be pissed off, you get off on your wickedness and say yes and then you teach me some cool spells!"

"Hey!" Harry snapped and flicked her in the forehead again. "No longs rants! That's my thing!"

"I've been hanging around you for two years now," Amanda mentioned rather dryly. "You pick up a few things." She paused and smiled deliberately. "Like, from you, Herpes and Syphilis and..." She shrugged.

"Ooh!" murmured Harry, looking impressed. "That was a good one."

"Thanks," Amanda chirped. "So, will you teach me?"

"Nope," Harry responded, just as chirpily.

Amanda's smile turned into a frown and she stamped her foot, crossing her arms over her chest and pouting like a six-year-old.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Because you're bugging me," Harry said bluntly and grinned at her obvious frustration.

"Harry," Amanda started seriously, all traces of play gone from her. "I've been up against Death Eater's and I know I'm not good enough."

"You've got that right," Harry muttered.

Amanda ignored him, her eyes strangely intent. "I know I'm not good enough. That's why I want you to teach me. You're one of the best wizards I know of and you have a library of spells that I could only dream of. I don't want you to teach me the kids stuff anymore- and I know that, to you, a lot of the stuff you went through with me was just minor magic. I need to know how to fight and to...to...to kill." She swallowed and Harry was uncharacteristically silent, remembering the tears of her first kill. She opened her mouth and paused, looking conflicted. Finally, she settled on "Think of it this way. I'm on your side. The more I know, the more I can help you."

"You're serious about this," Harry concluded shrewdly. "Why?"

Amanda gently took one of his hands in her own and gave him a watery smile. "Because this is telling me to," she said softly, taking his hand and placing it on her head, before moving it to her heart "And this..." and settling it on her stomach. "And this. Everything about me is screaming that I'm going to war and...I don't know why. I just know that I'm going to die if you don't help me fight."

Harry could feel the warmth of her body as she rested his hand on her stomach. He stared at her critically for a few moments, before a loud cough interrupted him. Amanda jerked away from him, her eyes widening, and she spun around. A teenage boy, a year or two older than Harry, was gazing at them with frank disapproval on his face. A glinting silver badge had been pinned on his robes.

"Amanda!" Harry said, acting shocked. "I felt the baby kick!"

"Baby?" Amanda asked in confusion.

"Baby!" the Prefect exclaimed.

Harry just grinned.

"Okay, brat," he said, still smiling- although there was something strained about it. "I'll help you. It's, what, the first week of December? Be ready next Saturday afternoon, in the old classroom. But, before I go..." His hand rose and he flicked her sharply on the nose, enjoying her recoil and flinch. "Don't be so mature and serious. It makes you boring."

With those final words, he spun around and strolled past the Prefect, leaving an ecstatic and fuming Amanda behind him.

"Wait, so I can't be mature and serious, but I also can't act like you...so I can't be immature?" she called out to his back.

"Yep," Harry responded loudly.

"You are so annoying," Amanda groaned.

"That's your problem." Harry snickered and turned the corner. As soon as Amanda was out of sight and hearing range, his smile dropped and he looked pensive. His hand moved up to his head, his fingers brushing against his skin, before he moved them down to his heart and then his stomach.

'That's interesting.' Meciél agreed.

'Yes, it is.'

A/N: Okay, so this chapter kinda deviated from the plot document by about 6000 words. A throwaway scene suddenly became the most important part of Meciél characterisation that I've ever written. Thanks to KrazQ, World and Narion for a spell-check. Enjoy.

It was almost pitch-black, the moon and stars hidden behind rows upon rows of thick, angry clouds. The flickering torches upon the walls didn't help much either as fierce winds howled through the damp, smelly tunnel. In this tunnel, a small group of people were being herded to the other end by four large and intimidating wizards. In the brief flicker of torchlight, these wizards could be seen wearing long blue robes with the crest for the Ministry of Magic stitched to their breast- the standard uniform of the Hit Wizards of Britain. As the group passed by another set of torches it was revealed that most of the group, or more importantly, those not wearing the robes of Hit Wizards, were wearing iron manacles and a plain brown robe. With long-practised movements that may have suggested boredom, the Hit Wizards shuffled the smaller group through the tunnel, ignoring the snivelling sobs coming from one of the prisoners.

"I didn't...I wanted to..." the almost hysterical witch was crying, thick tears running down her fairly attractive face. "I only wanted a little bit of spending money! Please, don't take me there...save me, please! I'll do anything!"

This went on for a quite a few minutes until finally one of the Hit Wizards had had enough.

"You there!" he shouted, his voice booming through the tunnels. "Stop your bloody crying!"

The witch only sobbed harder as one of the other Hit Wizards sighed and clapped his partner on the back.

"Lay off, Jeff," he said sympathetically. "You know where this lot is headed. If they knew what they were about to go through, they'd all be crying."

One of the other prisoners, a small, runt of a wizard with dark, greedy eyes, muttered something under his breath, snickering quietly to himself. Immediately, the third Hit Wizard rounded on him, the wand in his hand rising threateningly.

"Shut up!" he snarled. "Just shut up! We don't need any comments from scum like you!"

The wizard continued snickering and the Hit Wizard growled. His wand flashed through a series of well-practised movements and the criminal gave a startled yelp, his entire body going rigid. The manacles on his wrists and ankles let out a small clanking noise as the Hit Wizard continued the curse, before the fourth and final Hit Wizard cleared his throat nervously.

"Um...sir?" he asked quietly. "Shouldn't we be moving along?"

The first Hit Wizard, the one who had yelled at the woman, nodded approvingly and with a swipe of his wand, ordered the group to keep moving. The final Hit Wizard, who had remained rather quiet through most of the proceedings, sidled up to his superior officer.

"Sir, if you don't mind me asking but what did that wizard do?" he questioned nervously. "I've never seen you go off like that. Is he a Death Eater?"

The third Hit Wizard recoiled, as if physically struck, then laughed.

"No, my boy," he chortled. "We don't get any Death Eaters come through here. The one's who take them are the Aurors," he spat out the last word like it was a curse. "No, that wizard there, he had a particular fondness for sneaking around muggle playgrounds and schools with a disillusionment potion and a very patchy memory charm. Had beeps all over the monitors before we caught him. Somebody like him," he spat, "deserves every bit to where he's going. I only hope they make him suffer."

"Quiet!" the first Hit Wizard ordered from the front of the column. "We're almost there. Let's show 'em that we're just as good as them, right, boys?"

The Hit Wizards all straightened up and gripped their wands tightly as they approached the end of the damp and barely-lit tunnels. The prisoners all flinched in their thin robes as a gust of icy wind hit them, while the Hit Wizards remained motionless, their eyes scanning their surroundings carefully. They had just come into a small alcove, with high cliffs surrounding them on all sides. A thick mist simmered around them, probably hiding them from muggle view much better than the repellent wards were. They were also not alone.

Standing before them, in trim and dashing robes of crimson, stood three Aurors of the Ministry of Magic. One of them was holding a lantern of Gubraithian fire, radiating the entire area in a soft, green glow. The leader of the small group of Aurors, a large dark-skinned man over six-foot tall, moved to approach them. Two Hit Wizards herded the shackled prisoners to the side while the other two walked forward, their faces set in masks of perfect professionalism.

"I'm Senior Hit Wizard Brockelburst, this is Junior Hit Wizard Jones," the Hit Wizards introduced briskly. In the light, it was revealed that he was a slightly portly wizard with greying hair and a no-nonsense look about him. His partner, a slender boy barely out of his teenage years with all the awkwardness of youth, looked up and smiled nervously. He held a quill and piece of parchment in his hands and was busy transcribing the event. "We're delivering prisoner group 6-A, time delivered is..." he pulled out a pocket watch."9:41 PM. Please state your name for the record."

"Auror Kingsley Shackelbolt," the dark-skinned man intoned with a deep baritone. He gave a slight gesture to his right, where a pink-haired woman with a heart-shaped face and a grouchy expression was holding the lantern. "This is Junior Auror Nymphadora Tonks. To my right is Auror Williamson."

The third Auror didn't give any sign that he had heard his name, his wand now trained on the prisoners as if they were likely to escape at any moment. His ponytail fluttered in the breeze as his steel-hard eyes raked over the seven or eight criminals, a slight sneer on his face. Kingsley and Brockelburst exchanged scrolls and both ripped

them open. Whatever was in them seemed to satisfy them and they relaxed their guard.

"I'm glad I'm not going out there tonight," Hit Wizard Brockelburst said as his junior trainee put away his quill and parchment.

"Politics, eh?" Kingsley chuckled. "You lot should be more than qualified to escort these guys over to the island. I don't see any reason for you not to."

"Yeah, well, we can't," Brockelburst grunted. "Need any help loading them up?"

"It would be appreciated," Kingsley said.

Together, they strode towards the prisoners, Tonks trailing behind them. Kingsley nodded at Williamson, who nodded back and turned to the prisoners.

"Listen up, you little shits!" he barked. "You will form two lines. You will stay in those lines until otherwise directed. You will be silent unless spoken to. Failure to adhere to these requirements will result in me gagging you for the rest of the trip. Should you attempt to escape, lethal force can and will be used against you. Form up, now!"

For the most part, the prisoners scurried into their two lines. The short, squat wizard who the Hit Wizards had earlier identified just giggled, a far-away look in his eyes. Clearly, there was something not right about him.

"Prisoner #1078! You will stand in line!" Williamson bellowed.

The wizards continued to ignore the Aurors, still giggling perversely to himself. Williamson narrowed his eyes and raised his wand. There was flash of light or sound to indicate a spell had been cast but the prisoner suddenly gave a yelp as his feet, still bound by the manacles, started moving. He shuffled forward awkwardly until he was in line.

"Hey! Fuck you, you fucking cunts! You can't fucking do this to me! Do you know who I am?" the little wizard shouted angrily. "Do you know who I am?"

"Twenty says he's a muggleborn," Tonks muttered as Williamson approached the defiant prisoner. "The Purebloods never use that kind of language."

The wizard's shouts were cut off as Williamson roughly shoved a dirty rag into the lanky prisoner's mouth. Williamson smiled cruelly as he flicked his wand and the man's eyes bulged, the rag stuffing itself deep into his mouth and silencing his angry rant. Brockelburst hid a smile while Kingsley remained stoic. He turned around and gave Tonks a meaningful glance. The pink-haired woman looked confused before recognition dawned on her.

"Oh, right!" she exclaimed. She spun around and took a step forward before losing her balance and tumbling to the ground in a heap of scarlet robes. "I'm okay!" she called out, jumping right back up and brushing herself off. "Honestly, who puts a rock there?" she muttered as she disappeared into the fog beyond the alcove.

"She's..." Brockelburst trailed off.

"Strange?" Kingsley offered.

"Not what I'd take to be as Auror material," Brockelburst finished.

"She's very gifted," Kingsley said and frowned when he heard Tonks yelp again. "Even if she is a tad clumsy. She'll grow out of it."

"I see," Brockelburst said politely and no more was said between them.

They stared off into the mist, listening to the wind and waiting for Tonks to return. The first sign she had was the sound of water slowly splashing against something. Kingsley and Brockelburst exchanged looks before motioning to Williamson and the other three Hit Wizards. Together, they led the small group of subdued prisoners through the mist. Occasionally one or two of them stumbled but the group would

wait and eventually move on again. After a few moments, Kingsley halted. He raised his wand and the mist parted before him, revealing a small and old wooden boat-shed. In the middle of it, standing on a relatively small boat with a wide grin, was Tonks, who bobbed up and down as the waves slammed against the boat.

"Alright," Kingsley called out. "One row will go to that pier," he pointed at the left-most pier leading into the boat shed. "The other row will go to that pier. You will form up and board the boat one by one. You will move along until there are no more seats. Then you will sit. The manacles will attach themselves to the boat automatically. Oh, and for those having who think they're brave, your binds have been charmed and enchanted. If you try to jump in the water, they will drag you to the bottom and you will die."

"Um...boss?" Tonks offered weakly. "Yeah, they've been changed. Now they drag them up to the surface for pick-up. Well, all the new ones do."

"Oh," Kingsley uttered and glanced at the shackles. So did most of the prisoners, most noting that their binds appeared to be anything but new. "Well, in that case, feel free to jump over. I'm sure you'll be just fine." The dubious tone in his voice made it aware that he thought anything but.

The prisoners boarded the boat one by one, sitting in the rear, open section with their heads bowed as their manacles attached themselves to a series of thick, long iron chains. Kingsley did a headcount and gave Brockelburst one last nod before boarding the boat himself. The Hit Wizards watched as the oars of the boat started to row themselves, taking the prisoners and Aurors out into the wide open sea.

Destination- Azkaban.

The boat ride was tense and quiet. Kingsley and William spoke together in low, muttered tones while the prisoner craned their necks trying to peer through the mist. Tonks rode at the front of the boat, steering the boat quite expertly. Soon, a dark peak could be seen through the mist and the prisoners muttered to one another as they

came closer and closer to the looming shadow. Eventually they broke through the mist and the prisoners gasped as they stared at the foreboding island fortress that lay out before them.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Azkaban." Kingsley said grimly.

The woman from before broke down into a fit of quiet sobs as the boat continued to propel itself forward in the water while the gagged man stared up at the island fortress with gleaming eyes and a new sense of purpose.

The departure from the boats was rather uneventful. The Aurors led the prisoners up from the docks and in through the great iron gates of Azkaban. A nearby patrol of Hit Wizards looked up curiously as the prisoners strode through a small alley fenced off stone walls, glancing around furtively. Although the atmosphere was spooky, so far there hadn't been any sign of the dreaded guards that were spoken only in hushed whispers. As they came closer and closer to a large set of wooden doors, not unlike the Great Hall doors of Hogwarts, the gagged man became more and more agitated whilst the woman continued to weep softly to herself. The man was beginning to show signs of restlessness, his eyes darting around everywhere as his fingers clenched into his palms, breaking skin with cracked fingernails and drawing blood. The woman's whimpering seemed to be touching a nerve or two and finally, just as they were led into a small well-lit hall, the small wizard snapped.

With a giant holler heard even from behind his gag, the man launched himself at the suddenly-shrieking woman. They tumbled down together in a blur of brown robes and dirty skin, the man raising his manacled hands and bringing them down on the woman again and again. The woman shrieked and tried to hide her face as Kingsley strode over in a flash, his large arms circling around the imprisoned man and trying to pull him off. Tonks withdrew her wand and levelled them at the rest of the prisoners while Williamson raised his own, his face contorted in anger. He bellowed a word and the man stiffened, allowing Kingsley to pull him off the battered woman and throw him aside. As Hit Wizards poured out into the chamber, their wands out and their expressions grim.

"Ma'am?" Kingsley asked gently, trying to peek at the woman. She hid her face behind her arms and wailed, but Kingsley was able to catch sight of a truly battered and bruised face and cursed. "Williamson! Take her to the infirmary! Tonks, get this lot lined up on the walls! You and you, take this piece of shit and throw him in the basement cells. We'll let the Dementors give him a bit of personal attention for a day or two."

As the Hit Wizards scurried about, Williamson flicked his wand towards the battered woman. She froze, paralysed by his spell, and was helpless to anything as she rose from the ground. With a bored scowl, Williamson levitated her away from the small chamber and down one of the corridors. The woman continued to cry and weep, and the sound was getting on Williamson's nerves until she stopped. He was about to sigh in relief until he heard a choking noise. He turned his head and his eyes widened with horror at the sight of the paralysed woman, her throat practically bulging as she choked on some unnamed object.

"Merlin!" he cried out, dumping the paralysed woman on the ground with a thump. He bent down, wand at the ready, and gently touched the bulge. "Open up!" he instructed, then paused as he realised his folly. "Oh, right..." he muttered. He lifted his wand and, using the tip, parted the woman's mouth, trying to peer down her throat.

The woman abruptly stopped choking as Williamson frowned.

"Hang on," he began.

He never finished his sentence as a crimson bolt of magic blasted from the woman's mouth and caught him straight in the face. He was thrown backwards, spinning through the air and landing on the ground with a heavy thump. The woman lay there for a moment before she suddenly smiled and sat up, seemingly unconcerned with the binding spell that had been placed on her.

"Well that wasn't too hard," she said in satisfaction, raising her arms and watching as the shackles grew red hot. The metal twisted and bent under the heat and eventually shattered into dozens of pieces. "I don't know what all the fuss is about this place."

"I believe that it's getting out that most people have trouble with," came an amused voice on her left.

The woman looked up to see hauntingly beautiful woman leaning against the stone wall and looking very much out of place with her silver and white robes.

"I...oh, wait, hang on," the woman said with a frown. Her cheeks bulged as she made an odd choking noise. With a final retch, the woman tossed back her head and exhaled a stream of glittery dust, which suspended in the air right before her. The woman gave a little burp and patted herself on the chest. "There we are," she said with a grin.

The dust was spinning around, condensing and solidifying into a long, slender object. In a few seconds, it had become an 11" holly and phoenix feather wand with intricate runes carved deep into the wood and an odd odour about it, much akin to sulphur.

"I don't suppose you want to start healing my face, do you?" the prisoner asked the woman leaning on the wall. The dark-haired beauty merely smiled and the prisoner hissed in satisfaction as the bruises and other injuries given to her by the madman slowly knitted and faded away right before her eyes. "I think our Imperius Curse might have been a tad too strong. He really hit me hard."

"You're a big boy now. You'll get over it," the silver-clad woman responded dryly.

"Well, I am big," the prisoner agreed and snickered.

Suddenly there was a series of sharp cracks and running footsteps started heading towards them. The hallways apparently echoed quite a bit as the prisoner could hear them speaking to each other.

"...detected a stunning charm coming from an unauthorised wand!"

"...first floor, corridor seven!"

"Lock it down! Lock everything down!"

"Oh, well, we can't have that, no matter how much fun it would be," the prisoner said with what could only be described as a feminine pout.

The woman leaning against the corridor seemed to hide her amusement and watched as the prisoner flicked her wand, sending out a billowing cloud of thick, yellow mist. It settled before them, a hazy and opaque wall of fog hiding them from view- for now. With a lazy smile, the prisoner raised a slender hand and allowed a malicious glint to flash through her average brown eyes. For a split second, they flashed to the purest of green with irises wreathed with flame. The woman reached out for the mist with a single finger and paused.

"Can we say 'Fire in the hole?'" she smirked.

A single spark left her finger and the mist abruptly exploded. The fire spread from one end to the other in a flash, detonating with an enormous boom. Azkaban rumbled. The walls and floor shuddered as the sound of the explosion made its way from one end of the fortress to the other. A second later, an old-style alarm started to blare, a rising crescendo of sound that spelled urgency and alarm. The prisoner stared at the newly collapsed tunnel, sighed mournfully and rolled 'her' eyes.

"Right, Meciél," Harry said flatly. "Pull out the map and lead the way. I got some good old fashioned killin' to do."

The alarms continued to blare as Harry sprinted through the dark, damp and generally spooky corridors of Azkaban. There were a few occasions when Harry had heard pounding footsteps in a parallel corridor, teams of Hit Wizards sweeping the prison fortress in search of the 'loose' prisoner. Harry was content to avoid them for now. An encounter with the Hit Wizards would not end well for them but the enchantments would automatically pick up Harry's magical signature, no matter how much Meciél was distorting it, and the Hit Wizards would come flocking. If Harry was victorious one too many times then

the Hit Wizards would fall back and they would send in the heavy-assault teams of Aurors.

That was one situation that even Harry, for all his political obliviousness, wanted to avoid.

“Right, so I go left...then right, then...” Harry paused, his pace coming to a halt as he cocked his head. There was a dead end in front of him, one that hadn’t been marked on the maps that Kingsley and Dumbledore had provided him earlier that night. “Meciel, why’s there a big-arse rock in my way?”

‘This might be a problem,’ Meciel confessed.

“Can we kill it with fire?”

‘No fire,’ Meciel instructed severely. ‘Stay your wand unless you want the entire Hit Wizard force of Azkaban to descend upon you. Believe me; fighting large masses of magically-inclined people is always a bad idea. All it takes is one person to conjure up a curse of death and strike when you’re distracted.’

“Oh, c’mon!” Harry protested. “You’re talking about one of your other hosts back in, what, the 1200’s? I’m nowhere near as pathetic as that.”

‘Nevertheless,’ Meciel said, and there was a strange hitch in her voice that Harry couldn’t identify. It still irked him that after all his years of knowing the Fallen angel, she was still almost as mysterious as the first day he had met her. ‘I will be most displeased with you if you were to die.’

“Aw, shucks,” Harry deadpanned. “I love you too, Meciel.”

Meciel sniffed- a sound that Harry had always thought strange coming from her. It wasn’t like she had a nose, let alone a stuffy one at that. He was just about to tell her that when his ears prickled, and his head spun around.

“Oh,” he uttered slowly as six Hit Wizards began to sprint from the other end of the hallway, blocking the only way around the dead-end as well. Harry scratched his head, looking sheepish in his feminine guise. “I really have to stop standing around and talking to myself, don’t I?”

A barrage of spells, most glowing with the familiar crimson streak of the stunning charm, shot towards him as the Hit Wizards moved to subdue him. Their blue Ministry robes rustled and billowed as they slowed down, moving into what Harry recognized as a containment formation. The Denarian rolled his eyes and raised his wand. A single flick was all it took as the soaring stunning charms swelled and overloaded in a bright cacophony of light and sparks.

The sudden flare of light caught the two nearest Hit Wizards off-guard. They staggered, clutching their throbbing eyes, and it probably came to a relief to them when Harry strolled through the lingering sparks and light, his wand swishing at them casually. Both of the Hit Wizards, a grim, grizzled old man and a rather beautiful young woman with brown hair, stiffened and remained upright as their faces contorted in surprise. It only lasted an instant before the illusion Harry had cast on them sent them into a world far away from this reality. Not even he knew what they were seeing now.

“Monica and Greenhorn are down!” one man began shouting.

He stopped as Harry surged towards the last four, and a short but fierce duel commenced. The Hit Wizards were good, skilled even, and their spell-work and teamwork showed it. They moved together in well-practised movements, circling around Harry in a constant shuffle of dodges and ducks. Their spells flew from their wands at a rate that would make most ordinary wizards feel envious of. Stunning charms, binds of rope and iron, sleeping charms, advanced petrification hexes and even the occasional Imperius shot at the Denarian, wand movements blurring together as two of the Hit Wizards focussed on the immediate and overwhelming offence, while one stayed back in a clear, defensive position and the fourth began to conjure and transfigure large, drooling attack dogs and other dangerous beasts.

Unfortunately for them, Harry was no ordinary wizard.

He took in their defences, their stances and their well-practised movements that would have made even a Death Eater pause, and laughed. The Hit Wizards stationed at Azkaban were undoubtedly some of the best, especially given recent circumstances, but they weren't that good and Harry overwhelmed them in a few moments, two falling before his quick wand with only minor injuries, one getting an elbow to the neck and the last tripping over one of his fallen comrades and hitting his head on the wall. The transfigured dogs suffered a far worse fate as Harry had no inclination of holding back on them and their twisted, mangled bodies probably felt relief as the transfiguration failed and they reverted back to conjured bricks.

"Well," Harry started cheerfully, cracking his neck and stretching his body. "That was a fun warm-up and look- I didn't even kill anybody."

'One group of Hit Wizards is hardly going to cause my host any problem. Fifteen groups, however, just might. You should turn left here and...'

Harry tensed and Meciél's speech went unfinished as one of the two Hit Wizards that Harry had put under an illusion lashed out at him- in a strange sort of way. Slowly, Harry glanced down to see a delicate hand on his illusionary breast. There was enough magic behind the illusion to create a solid surface, and Meciél was very good with illusions, so it wasn't all that surprising when the brunette Hit Wizard giggled like a child, a vacant look behind her eyes and drool dripping down her lips.

"Bouncy!" she squealed.

She squeezed it again and again and, for once, Harry watched with complete and utter bemusement. It wasn't like he could feel it. The illusion wasn't tied into his nervous system. Instead, it acted like a second coat of skin that hovered millimetres above his real body. That was the reason why the feminine figure that Harry had chosen was just a tad taller and a tad lusher than his real self. It was easy to create a larger illusion around you but it became incredibly complex when it was an illusion smaller than your real self, something which involved space-time charms and reality-distorting enchantments.

"I..." Harry coughed awkwardly. "This is the most incredibly kinky thing I've ever seen."

He reached out and took a few gropes of his own, his guise sporting nothing short of a perverted and lecherous grin that looked quite out of place on a woman. Then, sighing regretfully, Harry waved his hand and sent the female Hit Wizard's consciousness into an enchanted sleep, gently lowering the brunette female to the ground.

'That was interesting.'

"You just have to wonder what she was really seeing through her own eyes," Harry mused, standing back up. "Anyway, now that they know I'm here, let's say we get rid of this wall."

They knew it was here before the resounding explosion rocked through the prison. They could feel it.

It felt like nothing they had ever experienced before. Ancient, vast and powerful, a swell of emotions so hauntingly familiar to them and yet so different. All of this trapped in a human body, a body that was also like nothing they knew. A human whose soul was not it's own, a fleshbag that stank of ownership and possessiveness. This unsettled some of them, the younger ones, but the rest considered.

Would they feed?

Could they feed?

They reached consensus in a matter of moments.

Firstly, they would try...

Harry felt something was wrong the first moment he strolled past the debris-riddled hallway. It was full of smoke, most likely from the gout of fire he'd conjured to smash past the barricade. It seemed to be a theme of the Ministry, throwing down stone-walls in the middle of a good hallway. For somebody of Harry's skill, it didn't do much to slow them down- but it did slow him down. As soon as Harry had stepped

past the smouldering and glowing-red hot pieces of littered stones, he immediately felt the utter coldness of this place.

It was a small chamber, full of smoke and- no, wait. It wasn't all smoke, Harry deduced, although perhaps some of it had come from the flame. It was rolling, spreading out- a mist. The coldness only intensified and Harry unconsciously shivered, wishing he could rub his arms underneath the fortified illusion. The mist was giving him a pounding headache and there was a dark grip at the pit of his stomach, similar to the calls of the Sword of the Cross except much, much worse.

"So, any ideas?" asked Harry quietly, keeping his eyes glued on the mist. Every fibre of his being was telling him to remain still and he agreed with it. "I don't think this is normal."

There was no outward or inward reply and Harry frowned.

"Oi!" he called out, and although his voice didn't betray him he felt distinctly nervous and worried now.

For as long as Meciél had been with him, she had never failed to respond to his calls. He knew she was still there because he could feel her, in a way. He felt whole, complete, and nothing like the time when she had been blocked from him. Still, there was something wrong and Harry dove inwards, his mind seeking out that of Meciél's. He brushed upon the brilliant light that was Meciél, a wondrous smile twitching at his lips as it did every time. The smile died down and he mentally recoiled, his mind snatching itself backwards from Meciél. Her presence was not the smooth, giant light that Harry had grown accustomed to. Rather, it was like a miniature sun, a tumultuous, chaotic ball of angry fire.

Meciél was in turmoil.

And Harry had no idea why.

"Shit!" snarled Harry, his wand whipping up as he tried to glare through the mist.

It was rolling and boiling around him, like a living entity, and for a split moment Harry thought he saw a dark shadow within it, a wraith-like figure dressed in a black robe. A split-second later it was gone, perhaps keeping out of view or perhaps scared of the loud bang that roared through the cavern as Harry blasted out three Effodios. The flash of silver light disappeared in the mist and Harry strained his ears, hoping that there might be the thump of a corpse collapsing to the ground. None came and Harry, making his decision, reached into his robes.

“...poor witch,” came a soft voice, an echo from behind him, and Harry spun around. The mist had already covered up and obscured the large hole Harry had blasted into the wall but it couldn’t quite muffle out the sound of voices. “I’d never wish this on anybody.”

“They’re alright,” another voice said in relief and there were scrabbling sounds of somebody standing up. “Minor injuries, nothing more. Lucky we got here when we did. They’d have finished this lot off where the prisoner didn’t.”

“C’mon, let’s get out of here,” said the first voice anxiously. “It’s not safe to be so close to a breeding ground. We don’t want to catch their attention, especially now that they’ve got some fresh soul to leech off.”

“If she’s lucky, they’ll finish her off by the tomorrow,” the second voice echoed in with a murmur, becoming distant. “I wouldn’t want to live like that forever, not like those poor bastards down in high security...”

The voices trailed off into a murmur of unintelligible noise. Harry wasn’t sure if they had moved out of range or if the mist was blocking them from reaching him. The words ‘breeding grounds’ were echoing in his mind, accompanied by a healthy dose of grimness and a massive headache. It was getting colder and colder, the headache getting worse and worse, but Harry had deduced what was in the mist and he was suddenly unsure and worried.

He never did manage to complete the Patronus Charm and the Dementors of Azkaban were quickly living up to their reputation.

'Meciel!' Harry thought fiercely, the name reverberating around his head. Were the Dementors blocking off access to her (could they do that?) or was something else going on.

"This is becoming a real pain in the...fuck!" Harry snarled and spun around, his wand flying up.

Something had touched him on the shoulder, he was sure of it! Crimson sparks flew off the tip of his wand but the Hellfire was strangely lacklustre, dim and dull. The power that surged through him did it at a whisper rather than a roar, which made sense, Harry supposed. If Meciel was so distracted or contained that she couldn't even answer his calls, how could he expect her to monitor Hellfire channelling?

Something leaned in close to his shoulder and Harry stiffened as a word was breathed harshly into his ear.

"Freak!"

"You!" Harry gasped, taking a lurching step forwards and spinning around.

Vernon Dursley glared at him as well as he could with his mangled, bashed-in face. His large bulk of a body had been torn up- something Harry remembered quite vividly. One beady eye stared at him, little bits of dead flesh and burnt hair falling down his head. The other eye, as well as a good portion of his face and skull, had been removed by a swipe of Harry's Bonewrym's claw. The Denarian could see the dead brain matter beneath the head and abruptly felt squeamish. He smiled grimly.

"So, its mind tricks, is it?" Harry asked quietly. "Well, they won't work!"

The last part came out with a roar as Harry flicked his wand and sent a billowing jet of flames at his former Uncle. The flames went straight through him and continued on, eventually being swallowed up by the mist. Harry wished he knew more about Dementors, about how they acted and how they preyed on humans. That sort of stuff was

Meciel's speciality. That thought brought along another and Harry's lip was curled up in disgust as he continued.

"You can't scare me with figments of my past," Harry snapped. "I'm not scared by that fat fuck anymore. I found somebody better than him, a family, and a friend! I have...I have..." Harry tailed off with wide eyes, his wand suddenly feeling loose in his hands.

What was her name again?

There had been somebody, right? She was the smart one. He could practically see her before him. A woman had come and taken him away from the Dursleys and shown him great power and, in return, he had come to treat her with the fondness and even love that... wait. Harry wracked his brains. When had he ever regarded her with fondness? All he could remember were the arguments, the bickering, the battles, the fights.

Something was wrong.

His mind felt clammy. There was something in there, squeezing past his defences like oil, oozing into his memories, taking what was his. The woman's face flickered in his mind's eye, the smile that Harry had remembered so well gone and replaced with a disappointed or a cold look that he had always hated.

When had this woman ever smiled at him before?

"I...you can't...this is..." Harry's words died in a mixture of confusion. He suddenly felt very young again, small and afraid of the dark as the wind howled and battered at his cupboard.

His Aunt Petunia rose from the mist, staring down at him as best she could with half of her body missing. A small, fat boy joined her, pointing at Harry as half-remembered jibes and taunts fell from his melting face. Harry had come to recognise, if not enjoy, the importance of their deaths in the future but when he had committed the murders he had hated it.

A glinting cross dangled before him, dripping with blood.

What had he enjoyed? Had he ever enjoyed anything? Had anything ever been fun? What was...this was not right. Harry clenched his fist around a wooden stick (his wand, it was his wand!) and his thumb felt the engravings on the wood. His mind, half-twisted and distraught over something he couldn't even remember, flashed with a blurry face and Harry summoned the last of his wits and screwed his eyes shut.

His battered mind, under siege by so many of the oily hands that were prodding and poking in every corner, instinctively fled towards the only safe place he knew. Perhaps they were stealing his memories and thoughts but they couldn't steal his instincts. His mind shot towards the chaotic ball of sheer presence within him and everything went dark.

Harry's mind, which had been on the strain of collapsing, abruptly felt clear. He groaned, clutching his head and trying to gaze around him. It was dark. No, it wasn't that it was dark. There was no light. Wherever he was standing (or was he sitting?) there was not a single speck of light within it. It was cold, freezing even, but somehow the temperature didn't affect him. He wasn't really there, after all, even though it certainly felt like it.

Mental magic could be quite confusing at the best of times.

"Meciel!" Harry whispered softly.

He was panting as he gazed around him, his senses completely silent. Perhaps that's why the rustle of clothing from behind him felt like an effodio to his ears. Harry didn't stiffen, didn't tense. He just turned around and watched as something limped out of the darkness.

Twinkling blue eyes stared down at him and for a moment Harry thought he was staring at Dumbledore, granted, a younger version of the old wrinkled Headmaster. Then, as he took in the man, he noticed he was wrong. The man wasn't Dumbledore, didn't look anything remotely like him bar his eyes. It was a bit hard to tell, though, given the large chunks of meat and flesh that were missing from his flayed body. Harry stared at the corpse dispassionately and then, without another word, strode past it.

The moment he did, he saw a glimmering of light before him. His pace quickened and his breath picked up as he hurried towards it. Something flickered in the corner of his eyes, a tantalising view of colours and noise, a flash of a memory. Harry ignored it, even as a loud, furious cry bombarded the air around him.

“Nicodemus! What have you done? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?”

The force of the words struck Harry like a sledgehammer. As he struggled with them, a face flashed in his eyes. It was a woman, tall, beautiful and blonde, with piercing eyes and a cruel smirk twisting her lips. Her fashion looked like it had come from the Roman era but it was what she was wearing on her intricately braided head that caught Harry’s attention, a glittery crown of jewels. The darkness shifted and became a hall as vast as the Great Hall at Hogwarts.

Meciel, in her blonde host, sat on a throne before him as Queen of the Denarians. All around, men and women dropped to their knees. At the stead of the throne, Nicodemus bowed his head in servitude. The image flashed, changed and, distorting with time, revealed another picture. Meciel, in her blonde host, was bloodied and furious, her eyes wreathed with flames. Standing around her were the other Denarians, and Harry recognised Vesper, Nicodemus and his daughter, Deidre, and a few other faces that seemed hauntingly familiar. As he watched, they impaled Meciel on their blades, their faces alight with dark glee, and the blonde Queen fell to the floor. The lower Denarians were on her immediately, their hands tearing at her dress and their mouths biting into her flesh, eating her alive. Nicodemus loomed above her, Lord of all Denarians.

Harry, with some difficulty, tore himself away from the scene and sprinted for the light. More memories and sounds played at the corner of his eyes, thousands of words and sounds, mostly screams, hitting his ears until there was nothing else he could hear. The closer he got to the light, the more frequent they became. His eyes were squeezed shut, his hands clutched at his ears and his teeth grinding into each other as he kept running forward, towards the horrors that plagued Meciel, towards the brilliant light that shone underneath his eyeballs.

He didn't feel anything but he knew he had arrived when the noises abruptly cut off. His ears were stilling ringing but he could hear the sounds of a soft breeze rustling the leaves as he opened his eyes. He was standing before a small, quaint little thatched-roof house. Beyond the house laid fields of grain, grown and ready for reaping. The grass was green, the sky was a brilliant shade of blue and there wasn't a single cloud in the sky.

It was peaceful and Harry could feel himself relaxing. He wasn't sure if it was Meciél's emotions or thoughts, but suddenly he knew that this was a place he could go to for rest, for happiness, for love. A smile appeared on Harry's face as the sun beamed down on him. It was like it was beaming down into his mind, soothing him as the dark dredges of his past were pushed away.

Then the world screamed.

Harry was thrown off his feet as the hut before him exploded in a tidal wave of pure concussive force. He went soaring for hundreds of metres, kilometres even, as the wave blanketed everything nearby. Trees that looked to be hundreds of years old were ripped off their roots as if the scream were pulling out a few insignificant weeds. The fields of grain were ripped apart in a flash, the very ground was torn asunder, a massive earthquake shifting and rolling beneath him. As Harry went soaring, he saw the sky turning red, ominous thunderstorm clouds rumbling and clashing with lightning. Suddenly, a bright light flashed in his vision, right from where the scream had originated from. Harry shielded himself, trying to shut off his senses to the memory, and knowing that he would have been killed a hundred times over just by the noise if this had been real life. The light washed over him, washed over everything, and then receded.

Standing on a nearby tree, Harry watched with wide eyes as a brilliant figure of gold, silver, white, of every shade and colour that had ever been associated with purity, stepped out. The quiet, peaceful farm had become an arid desert as the blinding figure screamed again. Finally, Harry recognised that voice, no matter how strange it seemed to him

It was the voice of an angel in pain.

It was Meciél, utter anguish searing the very air and turning it to ash.

The clouds rumbled as two blinding beings soared down from the heavens. Words were exchanged but Harry couldn't hear them, couldn't see what lay beyond the shroud of light. He doubted human eyes were meant to. Suddenly, the figures bathed in light were clashing and Harry became witness to the most devastating and awe-inspiring powers he had ever seen.

Voldemort, Dumbledore, Maeve, Harry- they were all specks of dust against the whirlwind of power that played out before him. The light crashed against each other and there were no words as to what Harry saw. The English language had not conceived them yet.

The one that undoubtedly was the closest was the word 'GOD.'

The heavenly powers were duelling and Harry's retinas were burned to the core by oppressive light. It seared into him, rendered him into ash again and again and again, blasting the very atoms of his body halfway across the world. He staggered, his mental self reforming again and again and again, and then halted. The battle continued to rage, the earth shifting up into rows of mountains that spewed out lava, the sea boiling and becoming a desert, the very air turning into a toxic haze of mist that whipped out into tornadoes and twisters. In amongst all of this, seemingly unaffected by the effects of this reality, was a cloaked figure.

It hovered above him, just metres away, staring away from the battle beneath its cloaked hood. Harry got a glimpse of grey, scabbed hands and heard the deep, throaty breathing of a creature that should never have existed. It could only be a Dementor. He glanced around with wide eyes and shuddered.

If one cloaked figure represented one Dementor, then there were thousands upon thousands of them watching the battle, floating off the trembling ground in a giant circle spanning hundreds of kilometres. They all faced inwards, not towards the battle but towards something else.

“Meciel!” Harry breathed.

The Dementor gave no signs of having heard Harry as the Denarian host scrambled forward, somehow clearing thousands of metres with each step. The mist got worse and worse as Harry got closer and closer to the centre of the Dementors’ attention. As Harry reached the centre, he saw Meciel, kneeling down in the middle of the mist.

“There you are!” Harry gasped with relief, collapsing at her side. It was like a thousand tons being lifted off his shoulders as he scrabbled for Meciel’s slack hand. “Meciel, I need your help. I need you to snap out of this!”

Meciel’s hand was cold and her silver eyes were vacant. Slowly, her head shifted and turned towards Harry. Harry’s relief grew but noticed that rather than looking at him, she was looking behind him. Harry turned and saw the same twinkling-eyed man from before. He opened his mouth, words spewing out in a language that Harry had never heard before, but Meciel obviously understood it as her hand twitched in his. A cold fury arose in Harry, his heart beating madly, and he glared at the figure, clambering up off the cold ground.

“You!” he shouted, lifting a fist. “Just fuck off!”

The resulting blow sent the man’s reeling backwards as Harry glared down at the ghost, which disappeared in a puff of mist. He turned, satisfaction on his face, only to see Meciel staring at him like she’d never seen him before.

“Who are you?” she asked quietly, in a tone so meek that Harry visibly started.

“Harry,” Harry introduced himself. He dropped to his knees and knelt down facing Meciel, staring urgently into her silver eyes. “Meciel, it’s me!”

“I don’t know you,” Meciel intoned lifelessly. Her eyes darted away, to the mist that surrounded them. “You’re nothing, just a sin of my past coming back to haunt me. I hate this. I hate the Void.”

“The Void?”

“There is no light,” Meciél continued. She was rambling to herself, her words thick and twisted as they flowed from her mouth. “Darkness implies the absence of light. In the Void, there is an absence of everything. The darkness is horrible, so horrible it burns and freezes you at the same time.”

“Meciél!” Harry called out, his face twisted in a mix of fear and urgency. “Snap out of it! Get a grip! It’s me, Harry!”

“The darkness is coming,” Meciél whispered and then was quiet.

Harry stared at her broken figure with nothing short of total dread. Never before had he felt as afraid as he did right now. Meciél was....shaking? Harry stared with stunned surprise as Meciél shook before him. Not a single whimper left her mouth but her face was contorted up in pure agony. Harry reached out with a shaking hand and tenderly touched her cheek. The moment his fingers came into contact with her, his entire world reeled over.

The darkness was inside Meciél, devouring her senses and consuming the mighty woman whole. It reached out and seeped into Harry’s skin, tugging at his mind, bringing him down with it. His senses left him and he shuddered. It was horrible, absolutely horrible. There was nothing there, an infinite sea of blackness that was swallowing him whole. He could feel nothing. His emotions had left him, drained out and never to return. There wasn’t anything to feel. Just the black stretched out for all of eternity, laid out bare before him. Suddenly, as quick as it had come, it had gone.

He was lucky that this was only a flash of insight, a tiny little glimpse into Meciél’s world and memories. His mind was not that of an angel’s. That darkness, which had crushed so many of the Fallen’s minds, would have snapped his consciousness in two and splintered it amongst the infinite black forever, after time had ended itself. As such, even that tiny little glimpse of a mere memory had almost destroyed him. One more moment and he would have suffered a fate worse than death.

The human brain had not been designed to cope with that sort of stress and Harry found himself on the ground, his limbs shaking and twisting madly as he went through a seizure. Even as his entire body shook and wailed with pain, Harry embraced the feeling like a starving man did with his food. After the blackness, even pain was better than nothing. The seizure continued as Meciél knelt there and the Dementors' watched but it subsided after a few moments, allowing Harry to pant and wheeze with effort.

It felt so real, like his body was really there, inside the horrors of Meciél's mind. Harry glanced at her and saw that the darkness had subsided. Perhaps even the Dementors could not stand it for that long and would rather face the wrath of a Fallen angel than suffer through it too often. He remembered now, remembered how many of the other Fallen had gone mad in the Void, and he finally understood why. No wonder Verrine had begged for her life, begged Harry to spare her life and keep her in the world of the living. Who would want to go back?

"Meciél," Harry croaked, crawling towards the dark-haired woman with some effort. "I am real. You're not in the Void! They're just making you think you are while they suck everything good out of you!"

Meciél ignored him but her eyes darted downwards as Harry clutched at her legs, using her tattered silver and white robes, so out of place in the dark, misty space, to climb up. Using the last of his strength, Harry leaned against Meciél and rested his head on her shoulder, feeling utterly exhausted.

"Can't you feel me, Meciél?" he asked quietly, one of his hands snaking out and clutching her own. "I'm here, pressed up against you. Your nice breasts are pressing against my heart. Can't you feel the warmth? My heart's beating- I'm alive. I need you, so come back!"

"I...this..." Meciél started, her silver eyes widening.

"For the love of..." Harry started and almost cried in frustration. "Meciél, there is nothing in the Void, no feelings whatsoever. So, tell me, how does this feel?"

He reared back and, using the last of his strength, smashed his head into Meciél's face. Something crunched under the force and Meciél reared back with a soft cry of pain. Harry slammed into the ground, his face feeling like it had just been taken to with a sledgehammer, but he was grinning.

"That's called pain," he uttered with choked laughter. "It's real enough for you, right?"

"...you are...that was..." Meciél stammered. Her face twisted in a supreme effort of concentration. "...beloved? Harry?"

"Harden the fuck up so we can get the fuck out of here," Harry growled. He weakly gestured at the Dementors and maybe he was imagining it but it seemed like they were inching away from the Fallen. "I wanna leave so I can go kill those fuckheads!"

Meciél glanced around, as if finally seeing her surroundings for the first time, and her eyes narrowed. In a flash, the vulnerable woman had been replaced by an enraged and supremely pissed off Fallen angel as the Dementors' hold on her broke. Meciél's silver eyes glittered with utter fury and she raised her hand.

"YOU DARE TRESSPASS IN MY MIND?" The words tore from her throat like an avalanche, sending the Dementors scuttling. Meciél smiled and spoke a single word that snapped the very world around him.

"BEGONE!"

Harry's vision turned into fire as his mind was shot out of Meciél's consciousness. As he took hold of his aching and tired body, noting that he had somehow made it across the room and his throat was aching like crazy, a tidal wave of Hellfire swept into his tired body. Harry stood up as the mist began to fade away, his eyes wreathed in flame and his ire higher than it had ever been before. Never before had either Harry or Meciél been so exposed and so vulnerable.

This would not go unpunished.

The large cavern was surrounded by floating Dementors. Many of them were slowly gliding to the ground as they shook and twisted in their tattered cloaks, bony grey hands clutching underneath their hood. Harry's was dribbling blood and he briefly wondered if he had somehow managed to channel Meciél's intent into a Word. It would explain the crumbling rocks that dropped off the suddenly unstable walls and roof. It didn't matter in the end.

Hellfire exploded from the tip of Harry's wand in the form of a twenty-foot bonewrym wreathed in Fiendfyre. It let out a gigantic roar and surged forward, crushing and smashing Dementors aside in a wave of fiery fury. At the same time, Harry conjured waves upon waves of fire to attack those Dementors who had been hurt or damaged by Meciél's explosive fury. He was grinning and laughing maniacally as the Dementors burned before him when Meciél stirred in his mind.

"Meciél!" Harry breathed in concern.

'Finish this, so we can leave this accursed place.' Meciél sounded tired.

Harry nodded grimly.

Lucius was standing up, watching the corridors carefully. He had attempted to tidy up his slick blonde hair and his grey eyes were proud, his very posture screaming of noble bearing. His gold had allotted him a cell that had a low amount of Dementor exposure and soon it would set him free.

He hoped it was his Master causing all the ruckus. He smiled thinly at the thought of Hit Wizards, Aurors and other pathetic Ministry scum dying under the wand of his Master. His smile faded, however, when he heard slow, measured footsteps heading his way. A sudden pang of worry hit him. What if it was his Master, coming to rescue him? Given the current political climate, that would be a horrendous mistake in the long term. Worse, what if it was his Master coming to kill him?

No, that did not make sense. It was not logical. Lucius smoothed back his hair and tried to ignore the niggling part in the back of his mind telling him that the Dark Lord was not always a logical man.

Finally, the figure appeared in front of his cell. It was a woman, somewhat pretty with sweat-slicked brunette hair and tired eyes. Lucius opened his mouth, a witty riposte ready, but the woman just slashed her wand and the words died in his throat. Red filled his vision as Lucius gasped, his hands patting at the deep slash across his torso. All that left his mouth was a fine spray of bloodied mist and one final gasp before he collapsed.

Lucius Malfoy was dead. There were no witty remarks, no final words, just an efficient and almost instantaneous death. The woman reached into her robes and pulled out a small, gleaming red jewel. She held it, muttered a few words and then watched as a flash of fire appeared above her, shot down and carried her away in a burst of flame. On the other side of the British Isles, the woman appeared in a flash of fire in a large, roomy office. She collapsed to the ground as Albus Dumbledore looked over his desk, his face grim.

“Harry?” Dumbledore called out.

“It’s done,” the woman said shortly.

Her form wavered and abruptly disappeared, the battered and pale Harry Potter taking her place. He moved forward and practically collapsed into one of the visitors’ armchairs while Fawkes soared to her perch and watched him with her beady black eyes.

“I see,” was all Dumbledore said, knitting his fingers together and turning to stare at his fireplace.

The twinkle in his eyes was absent, much to Harry’s relief. He didn’t think he could stand to see it without thinking of that man in Meciels’ memories. He shuddered, his body recalling the sensations and horrors of what had happened, and forced the memories away.

“Is your part done?” Harry asked instead.

Dumbledore didn't respond immediately. When he did, his eyes never left the fireplace and his tone was brisk, bordering between professional and rude.

"Another group has been implicated, a nasty group of debt-collectors that are known for their more extreme measures. If accused, they're likely to take responsibility regardless of their guilt. It is good business that way. One of the Hit Wizards who took you to the transport is known to the Order to be a sympathiser to the dark forces. He has been implicated and will be caught."

"Two birds with one killing curse," Harry muttered. "Well, technically it was a modified slashing variant but still..."

Dumbledore said nothing but he let out a deep, mournful sigh, his face still turned away from Harry. Harry frowned and suddenly felt furious. After all he had been through tonight, after all Meciél had suffered, and this man had the nerve to sit here and pretend his guilt-trip was the heaviest burden in the fucking world? He opened his mouth to respond but Fawkes beat him to it.

The soft, melodious tunes filled the office as Dumbledore visibly straightened up, as if Fawkes was helping lift a heavy burden off his back. Harry watched with gritted teeth, the song bouncing in his head. The song halted and the tune shifted down a few notes. For a split second, Harry saw Fawkes turn her head towards him and felt her song touch at his mind, and his fury snapped. In a whirl of movement, he jumped up, his wand outstretched, and the phoenix's perch exploded in a shower of metal shards and a loud, roaring boom.

Harry was barely aware of Dumbledore rising up, his eyes furious and his face pale as he held his wand aloft. Instead, he enveloped himself in Hellfire and glared down at Fawkes, who had dodged the spell and settled on Dumbledore's desk.

"Don't you... How dare you..." Harry snarled in rage.

The wand was trembling in his hands, his knuckles white with the amount of force he was holding onto the slender piece of wood. Dumbledore looked astonished and even Fawkes appeared surprised

and wary. Meciél shifted in his head but otherwise did nothing. She had done nothing more than read out the directions to where Malfoy's cell had been before barricading herself in her own little shell and staying there.

"Stay out of my mind," Harry finally hissed, the words bubbling below the surface refusing to come out in the wave of screams he wanted them too. "Stay out, or I swear to God, I will fucking kill you."

"Fawkes," Dumbledore said quietly, lowering his wand and perhaps looking at Harry properly for the first time. It might have been the shaking body, the quivering wand, the wide-eyed stare or any of the other dozen clues that Harry was exhibiting, but Dumbledore sat back down and nodded at his Phoenix.

Fawkes glanced at Harry, then flapped her wings and soared off Dumbledore's desk. She flew out through the open window, leaving Dumbledore and Harry alone in a suddenly too-small office. Harry lowered his wand but he was breathing furiously as Dumbledore sat behind his desk, watching Harry intently and waiting patiently.

"There was a room," Harry said out of nowhere, breaking the stiffening silence in the room. "Full of mist and Dementors."

"A Dementor breeding hive," Dumbledore answered with dawning understanding and his face was suddenly kindly and sympathetic. "Oh, Harry, my dear boy..."

"They got us by surprise and dug into our minds," Harry continued. "There must have been hundreds, thousands of them, all at once."

"Our? Meciél was affected?" Dumbledore asked sharply.

"The Void," Harry whispered. "It's horrible. They sent her back there again and again and again while they robbed her of everything good she had ever known."

Dumbledore was silent and, for once, looking absolutely fascinated.

"What was it like?" he asked quietly.

"It was...nothing," Harry answered and frowned. He clutched the armrests tightly and continued. "The Void is the absence of everything. Even eternal pain would be better than that. Pain is something you can feel. It's something that can generate feelings."

"How are you?" Dumbledore questioned, eying Harry critically behind his half-moon glasses.

"Meciel really got it bad," Harry said, blinking rapidly. He managed a weak, bitter smile. "They flocked to her. I was just an afterthought. Tell me, Dumbledore; have you ever seen angels fight?"

"No," Dumbledore answered solemnly.

"It was the most incredible and terrible thing I've ever seen," Harry answered detachedly. "Strange, too. They're really nothing like us at all, yet at the same time, they are."

"Harry, I think it would be best if you stayed here at Hogwarts for a while," Dumbledore said gently. He reached out to Harry, who recoiled at the touch and glared at him furiously. "I will look after you, I promise."

"What? No, I'm fine," Harry muttered and stood up, shaking his head. "I need some sleep and some rest and I'm fine."

"Harry..." Dumbledore breathed but Harry was already gone from the room, leaving a wearied and aged Headmaster sitting behind his desk uselessly. "I'm sorry."

Harry lay in his bed, the covers wrapped around him tightly as he tried to banish the memory of the Void away. It was hot, stifling so, but Harry didn't care. Hot was better than the utter absence of heat that came with the Void. The covers rustled, or so it appeared to Harry, as Meciel slid in next to him and watched him with silver eyes.

"You saved me," she told him quietly and the affection was thick in her voice. "Those Dementors...they could have driven me mad, perhaps catatonic. You pulled me from them and saved me."

Harry looked at her and smile. It wasn't a smirk or a leer, just a kind smile full of his affection and, dare he say, love.

"Yeah," he answered solemnly. "I did save you. I suppose that makes me a hero, doesn't it? Harry Potter, saviour of angels. Kinda catchy."

"Fallen angels," Meciél corrected bitterly.

Harry remembered her scream and her anguish and wondered what those two angels had done to her. He thought of asking her.

"Nah," he said instead. "You'll always be an angel to me."

Meciél was silent.

"Beloved?"

"Yeah?"

"That was the most pathetic and clichéd line I have ever heard you say."

"It's true though. It's just as true as the erection poking the small of your back."

Meciél laughed.

A/N: It's way overdue guys but here it is. Chapter 14. I will try to keep a better update rate, really, but I say that a lot so yeah. That said, this story will finish and will not be abandoned. I've got it all plotted out and all I have to do is dredge past the chapters with the necessary plot and all that and get to the good stuff. Only four chapters until I hit a scene I've really wanted to do for ages.

It seems that a lot of people liked the last chapter. I should do stuff like that more often then, not? Anyway, again I've gone and made changes to the plot document. A lot of the stuff had been penned in there since the middle of Denarian Renegade, so it was obviously outdated. I will tell you what I had envisioned in that time:

Harry would use an old-style pirate gun and a magic bullet.

So yeah, I'm not doing that anymore. A friend of mine, nuhuh, and I have been talking quite a bit about the DL plot and where it should lead so fear not. After all, this is my job and I'll lose money if- wait, when are you going to bastards pay me anyway?

After the mission to Azkaban and the subsequent ambush, there was a unanimous and wordless decision on both Meciél and Harry's part to have a couple of days off. It wasn't everyday that a hive of robed mind-leeching half-demons almost drove a Fallen angel and her near-immortal host to the brink of insanity. So, for the following five days, Harry did what he did best- nothing at all. Verrine was still out trying desperately to ferry scraps of information to Harry and Dumbledore had had the sense to stay away, allowing Harry his time alone. Still, there was business to be done. The following week, as snow drifted down from the sky and ice covered the busy streets of London, Harry watched on with a face that might as well have been carved by stone as the large, intricate summoning circle that had been carved into the wooden floorboards of his apartment literally glowed with a soft, whitish-blue light. The light shone in the otherwise darkened room, the defensive wards around the summoning circle too complex and sensitive to the nuances of magic to risk casting a spell.

Sometimes Harry missed electricity.

As the light dimmed, the room filled with a wave of bitter wind and the strong tang of Winter, unique in its smell that resembled a mixture of fresh snow and the decayed, rotten stink of dead plants. Harry didn't need to look up to know that Maeve had kept her appointment from a week ago and had returned.

He did, though, if only to appreciate her beauty.

Maeve stood before him in all her glory, all of it. Harry blinked in shock but managed to keep his face in check even as his mouth went dry and his palms suddenly felt clammy. All that covered Maeve were the occasional patches of foamy soap, which, contrary to the movies, didn't actually cover up anything at all.

"Ah, Harry," Maeve purred seductively and her feline-slanted green eyes glittered. "I was just in the middle of a bath when I felt your summons. Silly, absent-minded me."

Harry's face twitched and he tried his very hardest not to stare at her. Instead, he gazed around, wondering briefly whether Amaris had accompanied her mother this time. Maeve mistook his reaction for something else and smiled.

"Really, is this all it takes to render you speechless?" she asked.

Harry swung his head back to her and met her gaze squarely. He deliberately let his gaze drop, eying her body, and then looked up again.

"I've seen better," he said mildly. "Although...nice tits."

Maeve's satisfied smile didn't even twitch and it was hard to tell if Harry had annoyed her or not. The Denarian was distinctly aware that there was only a barrier of magic between them, a rather paltry defence in the face of the Winter Lady, but there nonetheless. Just a simple barrier that kept her naked, wet, soapy body away from his own, her undoubtedly cold digits evoking the greatest of heats from his body.... Harry shook his head and threw those thoughts out of his

head. It was a bit hard to tell what had been part of Maeve's glamour and what had been part of his own desires.

"Where is it?" he asked instead, focusing on Maeve's face.

"Ah, yes," Maeve murmured. "As I said, you took me by surprise and as you can see, I don't have any pockets on me."

"Then I'll send you back so..." Harry started.

"No, that won't be necessary," Maeve interrupted and smiled at him wickedly. "I have my own ways of getting what I need."

Maeve, under the narrowed eyes of Harry, raised her hand and presented it to Harry. Harry's face was stoic and unmoving as Maeve abruptly snapped her fingers and the summoning circle once again flared with a whitish-blue light. Harry's turned his head, his hand gripping his wand in preparation, but nothing could have prepared him for what came.

Amaris, as naked and soapy as her mother, stood before Harry. She seemed to have grown a month or so since Harry had seen her, but she still appeared to be around fourteen years old. Harry forced himself to ignore her nakedness, literally quivering with righteous anger, and whirled to Maeve. Hellfire bloomed in his eyes and his voice was thick with fury as he spoke.

"You fucking bitch!" Harry hissed. "What the fuck are you doing?"

Maeve seemed unaffected by his anger, merely smiling smugly and gazing down at him with a look that resembled pity- although Harry knew that the ice-hearted Winter Lady probably didn't even have the capacity for such an emotion.

"What am I doing?" Maeve repeated and shook her head, her dread-locked pony-tail bobbing over her bust. "Oh, Harry, you're as oblivious as ever. Do you really think that I organised this? Your daughter does have my blood running through her veins, after all."

Harry eyed Maeve suspiciously. Just because the Fae couldn't lie didn't mean they couldn't lie. There was no way Amaris had fallen this low. Right? Doubt stirred in his heart and he looked back at Amaris, who had slunk up to Maeve with her head bowed and handed her a small notebook. Maeve smiled appreciatively and stroked her daughter's head. With a sly smile and a flick of her hair, Maeve sent a sideways glance to Harry and bent her head down. Surprise contorted on Harry's face and he opened his mouth to interject. Half-way through the first sentence, though, he froze and gaped at what transpired before him.

With obvious relish, Maeve had captured Amaris' lips with her own. The naked Fae, who only looked as if she were approaching her twenties despite the centuries she had lived, had ensnared Amaris in a sensual embrace with her lips. The smaller girl accepted her mother's tongue, seemingly ignoring the way her mother's hands snaked up to her developing chest, fondling and rubbing with an aggression that left red marks. Maeve's nails dug into her skin, leaving thick, ugly tracks, but no blood was drawn. Maeve moaned as she deepened into the kiss, her body pressing against that of her daughter's. The Winter Lady heard Harry's fierce intake of breath and, smiling, she broke away from Amaris with a sultry expression on her face. A sigh escaped her as she wiped her lips with the back of her hand, looking extremely amused and satisfied.

During all of this, the slender dark-haired girl by her side still hadn't shown a single sign of emotion.

"Maeve..." Harry hissed furiously. He wasn't sure exactly what he should be feeling but the obvious display of dominance and sheer perversity of the situation before him was enough to make even him recoil. "You miserable bitch!"

Maeve said nothing but the half-human girl by her side cocked her head as she turned to Harry, her detached eyes meeting their replicas without a hint of emotion. She raised her hands and trailed them over her body.

"Tell me, father," she said quietly. "Will you love me if I do this for you? Please love me. Please don't cast me aside. I can be useful. I

can love you. Let me love you, father. I want to love you. I can give you anything you ever wanted. I..."

"Expuli Expulsum Amaris Potter!"

Harry's hard voice rang out through the room. It was strangely lacking in emotion and Harry watched the runes on the summoning circle glow, his expression tight and strained. Amaris looked startled, she took a step forward and raised her hand as if pleading with him, and then she was gone with an abrupt pop. Harry stared at the empty space she had just occupied while Maeve watched on with all the signs of sympathy that one might expect from a compassionate human being.

"It must be hard to reject your daughter like that," she said quietly.

Harry opened his mouth to respond, his entire body radiating his fury. Maeve watched carefully as he twitched, the runes on his wand glowing with enough repressed Hellfire to cast a bright glow all around the darkened room. Still, Harry restrained himself, thought past the murderous and hostile urges that were screaming at him to take Maeve out like the demented bitch she was. He took a deep breath and when he spoke, his voice was steady, albeit icy cold.

"Is that the information?"

Harry got the sense that Maeve was disappointed but nothing showed on the Fae's face as she nodded and held up the notebook. A title had been written in child-like letters on the cover, reading as "Harry Potter and the Order of the Blackened Denarius." Harry read the title out loud and cocked his head quizzically as Maeve frowned

"Yes, well, Amaris thought it would be funny," Maeve explained. She made a strange face. "I don't see it, but I don't really understand that girl. I'm beginning to think she needs a male role model in her life. Still, I indulged her. She is my very precious daughter after all."

For some reason, Maeve's lack of understanding of Amaris somehow made Harry feel a tad better. He motioned to the ground. "Drop the book and leave it there."

"You don't trust me to give it to you myself?" Maeve pouted, folding her arms over her chest and giving Harry a pitiful look with her soulless eyes.

Harry didn't say anything. It seemed like he was beyond words at the moment. All there was was a dark fire burning in the back of his gaze, making his posture radiate with threatening hostility.

"Ah, Harry, Your lack of trust hurts me," Maeve sighed mournfully.

"Like cancer, I hope," Harry responded coolly. He smiled thinly. "I'm not playing your games, Maeve. I think we're beyond that now, especially with that little display."

"Oh? Are you jealous?" Maeve said and her voice became husky, her posture inviting. "But just who are you jealous of? I have met many mortals in my life, little Harry, and not one did not have some kind of sexual kink. Tell me, who did you wish you could swap back then? Was it your daughter, or was it me?"

Harry stared at her flatly, refusing to respond to her baiting, and Maeve sighed. Any sense of amusement or humour fled her body and she became rigid, looking more and more like the inhuman creature she was supposed to be. Harry almost fidgeted under her gaze as she raked her eyes over him, probing him in her mind in ways he couldn't understand. Finally, an emotion appeared on her suddenly blank face that he could recognise: Disgust.

"Look at you," she breathed softly. "Look at what you've become."

"Somehow, I don't think you're talking about my charming good looks," Harry remarked dryly. "What is it, Maeve? What have I become?"

Maeve's lip was curled and she hissed out the next word as if it were a revolting curse-word.

"Weak."

"Weak?" Harry repeated. He smiled thinly and snorted. "I hardly think I'm weak."

"Soft might be a better word," Maeve continued. She stopped and smiled nastily. "Ooh, I have it now. Domesticated. You've become domesticated."

Harry watched her warily.

"Do you remember when I first met you?" Maeve asked him, her eyes literally glowing with Fae power as she prowled behind her prison of magic and runes. "Do you remember when we first met?"

Harry did vaguely remember his first trip through the Nevernever. There had been a troll or a goblin or something, and then he had stumbled onto a carriage out in the middle of nowhere. At the time, Maeve had been the most beautiful and royal person he had ever seen. He had been awestruck by her very presence and would freely admit that the Winter Lady had been his first crush, something that had remained for years. Even now, Harry could feel the stirrings of his heart at the mere sight of her, something he knew had absolutely nothing to do with her illusions and mind tricks. Maybe it hadn't been love but it had been an obsession of sorts. There was nothing like being on the cusp of puberty with nights filled with visions of a royal Fae.

Meciel hadn't liked it one bit. Years later, that awe had been replaced with mistrust, he fully agreed with her. The Winter Lady was a dangerous person.

"I remember it well," Maeve continued. "You were so full of fire and brimstone, so bursting with passion." She cocked her head, eying him disdainfully. "I'll even say that you were dangerous. You had so much potential, on the cusp of a world that could have taken you to the very heights of glory."

"Sounds like you had some expectations," Harry muttered.

"I did," Maeve admitted. "I expected you to become a leader, a powerful wizard and a hero. Your potential was so great that the world could have trembled at your very name. Instead, look at you

now. Tell me, wizard, when was the last time you bartered with those of the underworld? When was the last time your partook of a murder for your own twisted-sense of revenge?" She leaned forward, her eyes gleaming. "When was the last time you proved your worth as a Denarian, as a denizen of Hell? You've become domesticated! The stray dog, so full of fury and fight, has learned to accept the master's warm bed as his own and has lost the very qualities that kept him alive! When I look at you, I see a puppy where a wolf had been. I see squandered potential! I see somebody who could have been great!" She smiled wryly and spat out "I see nothing."

She gestured at him and Harry blinked, glancing down at loose shirt and grubby jeans. He frowned and glanced back up, surprised at the amount of venom that laced her voice. Her next words had a faint accusatory tone to them.

"You are nothing."

"I'm nothing?" Harry repeated scornfully. "Is that meant to hurt my itty-bitty feelings?" He gave a bark of laughter. "Maeve, why the hell do you think I need or want your approval." He paused. "Granted, my wet-dreams over the years might have leaned towards that but I'm ruled by my brain over anything else."

"No, you're not ruled your brain," Maeve disagreed instantly, stepping forward to the very edge of the barrier. Only a thick haze of crimson light separated the two now. "Now, you're just one lackey amongst millions. You serve a master when I could have made you a master."

Harry turned to where Maeve was looking and saw the Sword of the Cross leaning conspicuously across the wall.

"I could have been God?" Harry hazarded a guess and snorted.

It soon turned into a fully-blown laugh and Maeve's eyes glittered angrily. The very air around her was glistening with ice and snow and the magical barrier was shimmering beneath the aura of sheer power that the Winter Lady was letting out. Still, Harry kept ignoring it as he laughter died down, shaking his head ruefully and a smile tugging at his lips.

"Oh, Maeve, I finally get it now." Harry continued. He leaned forward, his face intent as the smile died down and the next words were hard and serious. "You're fucking insane. Me, as God? I hope that that's just some kind of propaganda line that you're feeding me, I really do. I'd hate to think that one of the notable figures that keeps the seasons changing here on Earth was really that fucked up in the head."

"Not the God, yes, but a god, certainly," Maeve said frostily. "Still, it doesn't matter now. As useful as you might have been, I don't think I'll need you."

"Oh?"

"Goodbye, my little puppy." Maeve waved mockingly. The runes on the summoning circle began to glow as a wave of bitter air shot through the room. "Our dealings are done, Harry Potter."

"Maeve!" Harry called as Maeve began to disappear in a shower of sparkling motes. When the Winter Lady turned her head towards him, Harry nodded grimly at her. "I'll see you later."

It was a promise.

"No, mortal," Maeve laughed. "You won't."

Some time later, Verrine strode in the room and paused. Harry was sitting on the floor in the middle of the living room, a notebook placed in his lap. His eyes were distant and he sported a strange, almost petulant expression.

"You called?" Verrine asked quietly. She paused and added belatedly "My Lord."

Harry said nothing but continued to stare at the wall. After a few moments, Verrine began to fidget.

"Verrine?" Harry spoke up, although he made no movement. "Do you think I'm a puppy?"

A strange sort of awkward tension followed that question as Verrine's thought processes paused.

"Um...sorry, what?" Verrine asked in confusion, eying him carefully. "A puppy?"

"I'm still a bad arse, aren't I?"

"Of course you are," Verrine replied after a moment's pause. "Why else would I call you my lord, My Lord?"

Harry pondered that for a moment.

"Yeah," he murmured. "Still the wolf." He stood up and dusted himself off, shooting Verine a feral grin. "C'mon, bitch. It's hunting time."

Verrine stood there with a peculiar expression as Harry strode out of the room.

"Wolf? Puppy?" She repeated. "It's hunting time?"

"Hurry up!"

Verrine rolled her eyes but obediently followed her master out of the apartment.

Despite the fact that the large table was circular, there were no questions as to who was the true leader of the small group that sat behind it. The room was windowless and dark, too dark to even tell the gender of the occupants until they spoke, but they didn't seem to have any problems with identifying each other. There were some stiff shadows that loomed behind the table, guards to the convention before them. The leader of all of this, a slender silhouette, idly tapped their fingers on the arm of the chair as one of the other figures droned on.

"...by moving our interests from here back to Asia, we can limit the amount of damage she can cause to the infrastructure of our operations," a burly, big figure was saying in a make, well-cultured voice. "If we limit our movements for the next few years, maybe even

decades, we could probably outlive the host. It's known for it's recklessness and their are already hostilities between it and the White Council. With any luck, the Wardens will deal with her. After that, I assume that she will be easy to contain. Her main strength lies within the almost absurd power of her host, and a mortal of that caliber only ever comes around once in a blue moon."

"I see a problem with that,Tarsiel," an figure interjected. "If you live a thousand years, the blue moon can come by for months. If you are immortal, then there is no limit. Let's not forget that the host is a knight. Who knows how that will affect Meciél."

"Then what do you suggest?" Tarsiel asked, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "Does the great Namshiel have a suggestion that could benefit the Order or are you just running off your mouth again."

"We need to find a way to destroy the coin."

For a split-second, the room was filled with utter silence. The leader of the group straightened up in their chair and it was apparent that she was staring at Namshiel despite the darkness that hid her features. Then, a rabble emerged as each of the figures voiced their strong disapproval of the idea at once.

"...tried and failed..."

"...could never go back..."

"...turned on us..."

"...why don't you just phone the Knights..."

"Silence!"

The word boomed in the room and the argument halted. As one, the group seated behind the table turned to their leader. At the same time, the lights flickered back on as the magic behind the exasperated emotion toyed with the electrical circuits in the room.

"Finally!" Tessa remarked. For a leader of the Order of Blackened Denarius and one of the most potent and powerful agents of Hell, she didn't actually look the part like some of the past leaders had. She was a small, slight thing, barely topping five-four and looking no older than fifteen years of age. Her silvery-white hair had been roughly chopped past her shoulders but her skin was pale and smooth. She had a heart-shaped face, a pointy chin and two huge and gorgeous eyes that seemed to sparkle with a child-like enthusiasm.

The lights abruptly flickered and died again and Tessa sighed in annoyance.

"Is it so much to ask for a little bit of fucking light when we meet?" she snapped. There was no reply. "Let's get one thing straight. Namshiel, we are not going to experiment with the coins. If we find out how to destroy one then, mark my words, the Knights and our enemies will find out sooner or later. When that happens, our organisation will be destroyed and we will be banished back to the eternal darkness for the rest of...well, eternity. It doesn't matter how powerful our enemy is, we won't go down that road."

"Lartessa is right," the voice that had been identified as Tarsiel agreed.

"I'm just proposing an idea,"

"An idea that must be so inherently flawed if even Tessa can see the long-term consequences," somebody muttered.

"And what's that meant to mean, Saluriel?" Tessa's sweet voice rang out.

"Nothing, nothing," Saluriel said quickly. "It's just that you're more of a 'short-term' type of person and for you to recognise such long-lasting issues only strengthens the argument against it."

"The question still remains," Namshiel said roughly. "Meciel and her host have destroyed the two strongest of our Order. She is actively seeking us now, even as we speak, and I have no doubt that she

hasn't forgotten what we all did to her those centuries ago. What do we do about it?"

"As I have presented, there are ways to remove ourselves from her sight," Tarsiel ground out between gritted teeth. There was some clear animosity between him and Namshiel, that much was for certain, and several of the other Denarians at the table sighed. "Perhaps if you weren't so busy being a complete moron..."

"You suggest that we go and hide like rats in the sewers..." Namshiel began heatedly.

"When did I talk about rats?" Tarsiel interrupted, sounding bewildered.

"It's an expression!" Namshiel roared, jumping to his feet.

"Here's an expression for the both of you," Tessa interrupted and slammed her hands down on the table. "Shut the hell up!"

"Lartessa, I..." Namshiel started, only to pause when Tessa swung her head towards him.

Even in the darkness, the brilliant bright-green glow of her eyes could be seen flickering with dark wreaths of flame and so Namshiel bowed his head and sat back down at the table.

"We will not hide," Tessa declared after a short and tense moment. Tarsiel stirred but said nothing. "But we won't confront her either. I have some good information that suggests that Meciél and her host have made quite the powerful enemy who will be taking care of her quite soon."

"Is it that Voldemort wand-wizard?" one of the other Denarians asked, a female given her voice. "He is quite impressive for a mortal. I can understand why Vesper would have tried to make him one of ours."

"There's a reason why I'm the head of the Order and none of you are," Tessa said. "It means I can tell you what to do and I don't have to tell you why. Here are my instructions. You will not confront Meciél. All operations will continue as normal. If Meciél and her host attempt

to come after you, you will do all you can to preserve the integrity of our current interests. If worst comes to worst, you will flee and we will start over again. Let Meciel and her host have their fun. It will not last."

A resounding explosion suddenly rocked the building. Tessa stood up and was halfway to the door before any of the other Denarians had reacted. She kicked it open and strode into the next room, which had the one thing the other room didn't: a window. Below, between two large shipping containers, raged a fierce but ultimately one-sided battle between several of her best, albeit mortal, guards and a dark-haired figure wielding a glowing white sword. Tessa sighed and stepped back, turning back to the council of Denarians.

"Irony can be a bitch," she said dryly.

"What do we do now?" Sauriel murmured.

"Follow me and try not to die," Tessa threw over her shoulder casually as she walked away from the window.

The rest of the Denarians followed her obediently.

The air was full of fire as it jutted forward, tearing through the asphalt like a hot knife through butter. Pieces of glowing-white shrapnel shot through the air, ripping through cloth and flesh- Harry's more often than not. Unlike his wounds, which sizzled and closed up almost as soon as they were created, the injuries inflicted on the guards were terribly fatal and many of them lay motionless on the ground. A group of them, tongueless minions of the Denarian's, fired their automatic weapons at Harry again and again, standing head fast in the waves of fire that brushed over them, literally melting their skin off their bones. Only then did whatever mind-control techniques that bound them to the Denarian's fail and they dropped their guns, rolling on the ground and screaming themselves hoarse.

"Verrine," Harry snapped. "Distract the guards. I'm going to find Tessa and her gang."

Verrine nodded, her silky hair billowing in the raging winds Harry's conjurations had created, and turned to a group of guards that were running at her mindlessly. She brushed some of the soot off her immaculate silk blouse, making a face at how dirty she was getting, and then raised her hand. If Harry was a master of fire-based magic then Verrine could proclaim expertise in earth-based spells. The ground shudder and split open, throwing the guards off their feet. With a slight smile, Verrine sunk into the crevice. A moment later, a pale hand shot out of the earth and dragged one of the stumbling guards down under with her. Screams filled the air as Harry strode towards the door of the small port building, blasting open the door with a casual flick of his wand.

He traversed the hallways, destroying the obstacles and people that got in his way, until he finally hit a dark room. The only light emanated from a literal crack in the air, a portal to the Nevernever that showed a glaring sun, a bright blue sky and a cracked, parched desert ground beyond. Standing in front of this portal was a slip of a girl, a teenager with bright green eyes, a small perky breasts and slim legs. She cocked her head at Harry amusingly and blew him a kiss before stepping into the portal. A second later, a loud tearing noise filled his ears as the portal closed up before him, a killing curse flashing past it just a millisecond later. He stared at the empty room thoughtfully, even as fire began to spread through the building and smoke began to fill the room.

"So that was Tessa, huh?" he muttered softly.

Verrine was waiting outside, watching the burning building before her with hooded eyes. As Harry stepped out, looking strangely pleased for somebody who had just lost his quarry, she bowed her head respectfully. Harry just grunted and stared at the carnage that surrounded them- there were at least twenty dead men and women before him, most of their bodies burned beyond all recognition. Here and there, there was a random arm or leg poking out from the cracked and splintered ground. Suddenly, from behind him, the building gave a loud groan as the flames consumed it and collapsed in a thunderous crash of wood and metal. Harry flinched, rubbing at his ears, but merely grinned.

"Yeah," he agreed to a silent comment. "I'm still a total badarse."

A/N: FOR JON! Apart from that complimentary dedication, I'd like to thank the guys at DLP as well. Dozens replied in the review thread and a lot of the suggestions that put forward really cleared up some canon contradictions, spelling mistakes and plot holes. I also got a few good ideas for the future as well, so it's all good. I'm gonna write some more tomorrow, in the afternoon. For Amanda fans, you can expect to see her then.

The air crackled and hissed, sparks flickering in and out of existence as the last vestiges of the powerful spell faded away. There was a grunt and a bark of laughter and then the ground shuddered, a loud cracking and splintering noise rising over the din. A loud crack emanated in the air and there was the sound of galloping hooves. An abrupt wet squelch and a loud crashing thud signified the death of that particular transfigured animal. Another bark of laughter filled the air, but it quickly turned into a quick gasp of surprise

"Damn you," Harry muttered, wincing as he clutched his bloodied chest. He flicked his wand, great jets of fire shooting out around him as spirals of water shot at him, attempting to constrain him.

Fire met water in a billowing cloud of steam and a loud hiss. His opponent- as old as he was- was crafty, skilled and very powerful. It was the skill part that rankled Harry, seeing as he probably couldn't cast half the stuff his opponent could.

"Old bastard," Harry grumbled as he stepped back into the steam, ignoring the way it scalded at his skin.

The steam abruptly parted, revealing the tall and imposing figure of Albus Dumbledore. His purple and silver robes were slightly burnt, his glasses were skewed across his eyes and he seemed to be breathing a little deeper than usual. That said, his wand was clasped firmly in his one good hand, the other hanging limply by his side, and his eyes were twinkling madly.

“So, it’s finally come to this,” Harry murmured grimly. He tightened the grip on his wand and stared down at Dumbledore with nothing short of utter contempt in his eyes. “You bastard...after everything I did for you, you’re just throwing me away? I suppose you don’t need a sword after the war’s over.”

“Harry...” Dumbledore started.

“Don’t!” Harry interrupted. He straightened his shoulders and sneered. “I’ve had enough of your fucking platitudes. Reason has no place here. Albus Dumbledore. You have betrayed me. Prepare to die.”

Dumbledore looked rather quizzical as Harry raised his wand and waited for the Headmaster to respond. Finally, after seeing that Harry was done, Dumbledore finally spoke up.

“Harry, just what are you talking about?” he asked mildly.

“Oh, c’mon!” Harry whined and all the contempt and anger left his posture. “I’m trying to get into the mood here.”

Dumbledore merely looked bemused.

“Okay, wait, hang on,” Harry muttered, scratching his head. He took a deep breath and scowled. “I’m warning you Dumbledore, give back the coin or I’ll kill you! No, wait, that won’t work. Um...Dumbledore! You killed my parents so I’m gonna kill you! No, wait, that won’t work either. Damn!”

“If I may, Harry,” Dumbledore interjected politely. He flicked his wand and twirled on his feet, summoning a great gust of wind that roared at Harry. Harry wobbled on his feet and took a few steps back. “Mr Potter. For the greater good, you must be dealt with. Prepare yourself for our final battle!”

“Wait, what?”

Harry barely had anytime to react as Dumbledore cleared his throat, waved his wand and delivered a powerful Word. The sound hung in the air, drowning out every other thing, and for a moment it seemed

as if time had stopped. Then, in a blur of movement, a powerful mental blast so powerful that it visibly distorted the air shot at him. In one fluid movement, Harry went down on his knees, twisted his body sideways, raised his wand and summoned a dome of almost-solid blue magic to cover him. It flowed over his form and hardened, temporarily immobilising him but granting him an almost unbreakable defence for a few seconds.

The Word shot forward, grappled with one of the most powerful shielding charms in existence and shattered it. Harry yelled as he was struck head on by the powerful blow, although luckily the shield had absorbed quite a bit of the force behind the Word. He went skidding across the ground, his legs and arms twisting and tangling painfully with each other. He finally came to a halt on the other side of the large room he and Dumbledore used for Word practise.

His arms and legs throbbed with pain, he was pretty sure there at least a few broken bones in there, but he ignored it and focussed. Two large wings of bone shot from his back, sliding through conveniently hidden slits in his clothing. Harry used them to push himself off the ground and glowered at the slightly smug looking Headmaster.

“Bastard!” He snapped. “You’re having way too much fun!”

“I assure you, Harry, that my conduct towards you is merely professional,” Dumbledore placated, although his lips twitched behind his beard and his eyes were twinkling way to merrily for Harry to believe him.

“Fuck you,” Harry muttered. He suddenly let out a savage grin and thrust his wings forward, so that they arced over his shoulders.

The two tips of the wings grew closer and closer and Dumbledore watched in fascination electric-like sparks jolted between them. Harry grinned at him in a bloodthirsty manner and let the two crackling wings touch. As soon as the tips touched each other the world seemed to dissolve in a burst of white light. A booming thunderclap roared in the room and something screeched forward, glowing with crackling bolts.

Dumbledore flicked his wand and a nearby piece of broken debris from one of Harry's earlier fire spells jumped to life and became a suit of armour. Murmuring under his breath, Dumbledore inscribed runes on the sheets of metal, encased in it a powerful protection charm and sent it intercept the energy bolt with three flicks, one swish in less than a second.

The bolt hit the suit of armour and dissipated harmlessly even as two large and vicious looking dogs appeared at Dumbledore's side. Harry scowled at the unmarred suit of armour and looked petulant.

"Ah, I was hoping that that spell of yours had an electrical nature of sorts," Dumbledore said lightly. "Although, I must say I am impressed. I was not aware you could cast spells with your other...appendages."

"I don't want you to even start thinking about my 'appendages', Dumbledore," Harry muttered. "Besides, it wasn't really a proper spell. With Meciél's help, I put a few near-invisible runes on my clothes. When I move, all the static electricity that's made is stored in my body. When it's ready, I just temporarily disable the runes, point the spell and let it loose."

"Ingenious," Dumbledore said, impressed.

"Ingenious, he says, after creating an invulnerable suit of armour in less than a second," Harry scoffed. He cleared his throat and grinned. "Well, let's see how it takes this."

He opened his mouth, paused for a moment and then said a Word that resembled a mix between a rumbling stomach and the neighing of a hoarse. Something flickered in the air and blew Harry's hair back. The suit of armour, at Dumbledore's prodding, started to leap forward but abruptly paused. Harry closed his mouth and coughed, ignoring the warm trickle of blood that dribbled from his mouth.

The suit of armour hung in the air, seemingly suspended by a set of invisible wires and Dumbledore frowned. He flicked his wand and a jet of crimson light soared forward, blowing back little pieces of debris from the ground by the sheer force and speed of the spell. It shot at

Harry but as it zoomed past the suit of armour it too slowed and stopped.

"It's a space and time bubble thingy," Harry explained with a grin. "Well, it's more of an oblong than a bubble, really. Speedy thing goes in, never comes out until the oblong thingy dissipates."

"Intriguing," Dumbledore muttered as he prodded and poked his wand towards the bubble. "I would be hard pressed to accomplish something like this with just my wand."

"Do you know what phrase in go-zshruken that makes this?" Harry asked with a waggling of his eyebrows. "I think it's something like 'what time is it?' which is actually just all one word for them."

"Harry, my dear boy," Dumbledore said and a grandfatherly chuckle. "You talk too much."

In a blur, the ground around Harry exploded and a metal cable rose up and lashed out at Harry. Harry stepped back, startled, but it was too late as it wrapped around Harry. An instant later, dozen of little pieces of debris grew and darkened and Harry soon became encased in an iron suit of sorts, bound by the powerful magnetic forces between the metal and Dumbledore's spell.

"Hey- ouch!" Harry scowled. "Dumbledore! Do you know what your problem is?"

Dumbledore smiled, but his smile faded into genuine surprise as something rustled behind him.

"You let me talk too much," Harry's voice came from behind him.

Dumbledore started to spina round as a second Harry bellowed out an incantation. For a split second Dumbledore paused, his eyes flashing over the second Harry, and then his face tightened and he whirled back to the captured Harry- who was not quite as captured as he had been a split-second ago. He had managed to get his wand free and thrust it towards the aged Headmaster.

Fire billowed out in a wide spray of heat and smoke. Dumbledore raised his wand but he was too slow and the fire caught him, twisting around him and digging into his clothes. Harry's eyes widened as Dumbledore let out a terrible scream, his wand falling uselessly from his hands as he attempted to pat the fire out of his robe. The Denarian almost jumped up to help but then he stiffened and the horror faded away from his face, leaving resignation.

"Ah, shit," he sighed as Albus Dumbledore's wand tapped him on the shoulder from behind. The illusionary Dumbledore on fire before him suddenly stopped moving and disappeared with a shimmer of light. "I guess you got me."

Harry stared into the bottom of his tea-cup with a reluctant scowl. He was sitting behind the desk of Dumbledore's office as the old man drank his own tea and stared out the window with an expression of wistfulness. It had been a week since Harry had met Maeve and there were only two or so weeks left until Christmas. The sky was full of dark clouds and snow fell to the ground, gently swayed by the occasional gust of wind. Hogwarts, Harry decided, looked quite nice when it was snowing but Harry hated it. He had always hated the cold.

It was probably a childhood thing.

Harry took another sip of his cup and enjoyed the burn of Firewhiskey that seemed to light a fire in the pit of his stomach. His entire body felt warm and tingly all over and he allowed himself to relax and enjoy the light-headedness of being drunk, something he rarely allowed himself to enjoy- and when he said 'he' he really meant 'she'.

Alcohol affected his senses, which meant Meciél's capacity to sense danger was limited, which meant that any two-bit assassin could sneak up on him and slit his throat when he was asleep in a drunken stupor. There had been a couple of times when Meciél had let Harry enjoy the buzz that alcohol brought along. At Hogwarts, she allowed it since he was, most likely, safe.

"Ah," Harry uttered, along with a satisfying burp. "Whoever invented the expansion charm should have won a medal or something."

“They did,” Dumbledore said mildly, enjoying his plain but strong tea. “Order of Merlin: Second Class, for Spell Innovation and Charm Creation.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Harry grumbled. “All I hear is Spell this and Charm Creation that. What does the guy want, a bloody medal?”

Dumbledore sipped his tea and smiled faintly. The mood was rather light and relaxed in the office. Harry was watching Dumbledore’s twinkling gaze thoughtfully. There was something nagging at the back of his mind at the sight of those bright blue eyes, but Harry just couldn’t remember what it was. These thoughts were driven out of his mind as Dumbledore glanced at the portraits, sending them a wordless command to leave. The portraits obeyed obediently and Dumbledore followed it up with a charm, deployed by merely clicking his fingers.

Hogwarts former Headmasters may have been on Dumbledore’s side but it was never unwise to be too safe.

Harry watched Dumbledore a tad warily as the old man leaned back in his chair, stroking his beard thoughtfully. He picked up his tea cup again and then, with only a sharp glance, sent a folder on his desk careening out to Harry. Harry instinctively caught it and glanced at it. What he saw made him start with surprise.

“Voldemort has a Horcrux in Gringotts?” Harry asked in disbelief. He pondered that. “It makes sense, I suppose.”

“It was entrusted to one Bellatrix Lestrange some years ago,” Dumbledore informed him. “She subsequently deposited in her secure family vault- the Black Family Vault. Sirius Black has attempted to retrieve it for me but, as he was disowned, he is unable to access that part of the Black family fortune.”

“Azkaban and now Gringotts? You don’t make it easy, do you?” Harry muttered sourly. However, he sported a sneaky little grin and looked quite eager to get into it. “Okay, so how did you want me to do this?”

"This time, Harry, I must ask for your discretion," Dumbledore said solemnly. "I have been in contact with some of the administration at Gringotts but all my attempts have been in vain. I also suspect that it will only be a matter of time before Lord Voldemort knows of my interest of the Black Family Vault, which will alert him of our knowledge of his Horcruxes. Once he knows that we know, finding them will be much more troublesome."

"Okay then," Harry said, rubbing his hands together thoughtfully. "I'm not robbing Gringotts for the Horcrux, I'm just robbing it for the gold." He pondered that for a moment. "That might not be a bad idea, actually. I could always use some extra cash."

"Are your finances in trouble?" Dumbledore asked, looking concerned. "I could always offer you a loan if need be..."

"Nah," Harry said with a wave of his hand. "I just like hoarding stuff. I guess I'm a bit like a Drakon."

"Ah, that reminds me," Dumbledore said, stroking his beard. "There are unconfirmed rumours and it is a publicly known secret that the goblins of Gringotts have in their possession a number of dragons. Not the ones of ancient times, the Drakons," he added quickly. "But they still might pose a problem for you."

"I see..." Harry drawled slowly, his brows furrowed in thought. "Okay. Good to have the info. What else do I need to know? Where's the Black Family Vault?"

"I don't know," Dumbledore answered quietly. "I'm afraid that Sirius himself doesn't even know. Only an adult of the Black family could access it and Sirius was disowned at the age of sixteen."

"No worries then," Harry responded. "I'll just raid Gringotts, the supposedly most secure bank in the world and steal something from a vault where I don't know where it is."

"I understand your frustration, Harry..." Dumbledore started gently and Harry blinked.

“No, I wasn’t being sarcastic or anything,” he said lightly. “That’s what I’m gonna do. I have a few...er...’friends’ I suppose you could call them. They can give me a hand. Besides,” he added darkly. “The goblins can tell what I am. They can sense her. They’ll be very receptive to my threats.”

Dumbledore breathed in deeply and the exhale turned into a sigh.

“I suddenly have a bad feeling about this,”

“So you should.” Harry grinned. He stretched his neck to the side, then up and rolled his shoulders enjoying the cracks and pops that followed. “This is going to be fun.”

“Harry,” Dumbledore commented seriously. “I must ask you to restrain yourself if at all possible. The goblins are a neutral party. They care not for anything that does not glitter. However, if they become aware that the Order of Phoenix was behind this raid then the consequences will be dire indeed.”

“I’m probably going to have to kill a few,” Harry remarked blandly, watching the Headmaster closely. “I’ll need to find the location of the vault. After that, I promise that I’ll try to be...nice.”

“Is that a thrice-bound promise?” Dumbledore asked, peering over his half-moon glasses. “Are you still content to follow the rules of the Old World?”

“Well...” Harry hesitated. “If that’s the case, then I won’t promise anything. I will promise you this though. I’ll get you this cup.”

He brandished a picture of a gleaming, golden chalice at Dumbledore, who hesitated and then sighed.

“Very well,” was all he said. “Now, let us make the arrangements. I believe that an assault during the twilight would be your best possible- Harry, where are you going?”

“What?” Harry asked, turning around halfway towards the office door. “Oh. I’m going to go get you this cup.”

"Now?" Dumbledore looked incredulous.

"They won't be expecting it," Harry said casually. "Don't worry, I'll disguise myself and I really will try to get it out peacefully. If I scare the goblins enough, they might fold."

"Why the rush, Harry?"

"No rush," Harry answered defensively. He scowled. "What, are you saying I can't handle it? Because I can! I'm still as strong as the day...well, I really don't know how to finish that sentence. The point is, this job of yours is already done."

"I wasn't saying anything of the like," Dumbledore placated gently.

"Good," Harry said, but he looked a bit sheepish. "Besides, I need to be back after lunch to give the little blonde bint her extra-curricular lesson. We're going to make a sadistic brutal killer out of her yet."

"Oh?" Dumbledore uttered, his eyes twinkling. "You're tutoring Ms. Carpenter again?"

"Yep," Harry answered shortly.

He gave Dumbledore a look that clearly expressed his desire for the old man to drop it there. Dumbledore, naturally, ignored it.

"May I enquire as to why?" the Headmaster asked, taking another sip of his tea and watching Harry with a slight smile.

"You can," Harry agreed. "Of course, I could renounce my evil ways and give all my money to orphaned children- but I probably won't."

Dumbledore smiled as Harry turned around. As Harry opened the door and took a step outside the office, he called out to the Denarian, his face suddenly devoid of his good cheer.

"Harry?"

Harry turned back to face him.

“Good luck.”

"Luck?" Harry snorted and turned around. "Who needs luck in the face of immeasurable firepower?"

The mission to raid one of the most secure magical locations in all of Britain began as those types of missions always did: with an ice-cream. Harry licked at the magically-flavoured frozen treat with great relish, enjoying the 'natural' flavours for once. He licked his frozen lips, barely even feeling the cold of the winter morning, and cocked his head to the spectre seated next to him.

"You know, I can tell that there's a difference," Harry muttered under his breath.

His eyes scanned the crowds of tense robed wand-wizards that strolled past him. Since Hogwart's was on it's Christmas break, there were more families out and about- some even managing to infect the tense and depressing atmosphere with a bit of cheer.

"No, you can't," Meciél sighed in exasperation. She waved her illusionary hands and her beautiful features scrunched up somewhat as an icy cold wind battered Harry, making several of the passers-by huddle into their thick robes. "I have perfect control over your perception. You can't."

"I can," Harry insisted as he enjoyed his ever-lasting sundae- double chocolate and extra large.

Some part of him, well hidden from Meciél, was glad to see that the Fallen was beginning to interact with him more often. Meciél had been shaken by the event at Azkaban and her recent silence had made Harry worry. Even now, she seemed preoccupied and disengaged.

Harry paused, taking another bite and savouring the taste. He gave a decisive nod. "Yep, I totally can."

"I'm telling you..." Meciél started, before she paused and cocked her head. "Oh, and who is this?"

"Who are you talking to?" somebody demanded in a snobbish voice.

Harry blinked and turned his head. Sitting at one of the other tables was a small girl, perhaps eleven or twelve. She had the air of her that just screamed superiority and arrogance. Her robes were immaculate, her glittering black hair carefully done up, and her crystal blue eyes shone with a fierce type of pride.

"The real question is: who are you talking to?" Harry responded gravely.

The girl cocked her mouth. "A madman, I think," she responded snootily and smirked when Harry scowled.

"Ah, shut it, you little brat," he muttered.

He turned around and went back to his sundae, his good mood slightly dimmed. The girl, however, wasn't finished yet.

"So this is the great Harry Potter," she drawled. "A madman who talks to his ice-cream. I see why the people are so inspired by you. I'm sure the Dark Lord is quivering in his boots."

Harry stiffened and spun around. His narrowed eyes glinted with annoyance as the girl sat there, looking as if she didn't have a care in the world. That, more than anything she said, pissed Harry off.

"Girl, do you know exactly what I could do to you?" Harry growled. He let his eyes flash with a dark fire and a nasty grin spread across his face as the girl blanched. "Scram or I'll show you!"

The girl made a derisive noise but stood up, pushing her ice-cream aside. Harry watched her intently as she left the table, throwing Harry a wary backwards glance. Harry sniggered and turned back to his sundae- only to meet two sparkling brown eyes.

"Gah!" Harry yelped.

“Eek!” the little girl screeched and fell backwards on her backside.

“For the love of...” Harry breathed, putting away his wand with a sigh. If the girl knew how close she had just come to dying- and what the hell was it with everybody sneaking up on him today.

‘Way to have my back?’

‘I’m sorry, Harry,’ Meciél said insincerely. ‘You know how I am up here with your perception.’

“Oh, not cool,” Harry muttered as the girl struggled up, beaming at Harry with an almost-infectious smile. Harry remained stone-faced and the girl’s smile faltered.

“What is it?” he snapped.

“I...er...” the girl stuttered, her cheeks suddenly becoming bright red. She brushed some of her dark hair out of her eyes and suddenly looked nervous. “I just wanna say that...” what she said next was muttered in an illegible rush.

“What?” Harry said, resisting the urge to rub his forehead and groan. “Say it slower, you little brat. Who are you, anyway?”

“I’m...Laura,” the girl stuttered. “Laura Madley. I go to Hogwarts too!”

“No, no, no,” Harry groaned. “Don’t ever give out your full name like that.”

“Why not?” The girl’s looked at him with wide unblinking eyes.

“Do you know how many dark and evil curses can be used on somebody who told somebody else their name?” Harry leaned in, emphasising certain words to prove his point.

The girl absently brushed back her dark hair and her eyes widened. She looked pale and scared and Harry grinned none-too-nicely.

“Now,” he said softly. “What is it?”

“I...you’re Harry Potter!” the girl exclaimed and Harry flinched and looked around.

Nobody seemed to have heard her and he turned back to her. The kid, probably a second or third year at Hogwarts, seemed to have picked up on Harry’s annoyance and was visible shaking.

“I...um...just...er...Merry Christmas! Bye!” the girl shot out and turned tail and fled.

Harry watched race towards two adults, both dressed in muggle clothing, with bemusement on his face and sighed.

“You know,” he seemingly remarked to nobody. “If there was somebody else behind me trying to sneak up on me, I’d have to pull out my wand and show how I killed, oh, let’s say, Nicodemus.”

A moment passed. Then, there was a deliberate scuff of feet and a obviously fake cough. Harry cocked his head and grinned, spinning around to see Verrine standing before him, looking quite unamused.

“You’re late,” Harry remarked casually.

“Finding this place proved to be...difficult.”

“If you can’t find a stupid shopping alley then how do you think you’ll find Tessa and the other Denarians?” Harry asked.

Verrine gritted her teeth and reflexively smoothed over her silk blouse. It probably wasn’t the best choice in clothing for the type of weather they were having but it wasn’t like she could feel it. Perception-alterations were pretty nifty, after all.

“Alright,” Harry declared after finishing his sundae. “Let’s do this.”

The current political climate was having a rather severe effect on Gringotts as a business. Anxious wizards and witches, especially those who had suffered greatly during Voldemort’s first uprising, were

pulling out all of their money and keeping it in a more accessible location in case of the worse-case scenario: Voldemort's victory. Gringotts response to that had been to offer several lucrative deals, including high interest rates for fixed-term deposits. It had worked, to a certain extent, and every day a steady stream of customers strolled in and out of the banks. It wasn't too strange to see some of the huddled up in thick robes and hoods, trying desperately to keep their faces from being seen. Nobody wanted to catch the eye of a Death Eater, especially one who might see a face and remember that half-blood from Hogwarts all those years ago.

However, the two heavily-robed figures who strolled into Gringotts around about lunchtime carried themselves differently from everybody else. They were both draped in heavy robes, their heads covered with great hoods that obscured their faces completely. Their postures were relaxed, smug even, and their very presence seemed to cause the harried wizards and witches waiting in line to edge away from them. Only a few actually protested when the robed figures ignored the queue and immediately strode to the front of the line.

Some of the wizards were smart. Some of them saw how the goblin guards, who usually amounted to nothing more than gleaming decorations that stood immobile by the huge pillars of marble, tensed and gripped their spears. The goblins at the front of the desk simultaneously paused as one, their sharp, beady eyes shooting down the queue and locking onto the source of darkness. To those non-human creatures, they could literally see the ancient shadows that clung to the two Denarians and many tensed and went silent.

The two figures reached the front of the room and casually shoved aside the tall, balding wizard who was currently being served. The wizard looked like he was about to make an objection, but seeing the two dark-robed figures who had bumped him, decided that it wasn't worth making a fuss over and quickly took a few steps back.

"What do you want?" the goblin hissed softly, even as the guards edged across the perimeter of the room.

“One of your vault contains something of ours,” the taller one said, a male who’s voice was muffled by the thick hood. “You will take us to the vault so we can retrieve it.”

The goblin narrowed its eyes and chewed on its lip with its razor sharp teeth thoughtfully. Its leathery skin and permanent scowl seemed even more wrinkled and furrowed than usual. Finally, it seemed to have come to a decision and straightened.

“Key?” the goblin sneered.

The shorter of the two cocked her head.

“We have none,” she said smoothly.

“Oh,” was all the goblin uttered. He eyed them shrewdly, pondering something in his small little head, before he snapped his fingers. “You will need to see the manager.”

“The manager?” the male repeated.

“Yes,” the goblin confirmed. He snapped his fingers again and suddenly they were surrounded by two dozen of the speak-wielding goblins. The bank erupted into a wave of mutters as the cloaked figures remained motionless. “You will go see the manager.”

“Very well,” the male conceded. He turned to go but paused.

For the wizards and witches and wizards in the bank, nothing seemed to happen. For the goblins, however, a sudden aura of blazing scarlet and deep, bottomless ebony rose up around him, radiating menace- a fury and power that made them cringe. The guards tensed, but several of them were shaking and the goblin behind the desk suddenly knew that the cloaked figure was smiling.

“Tread wary, little exile,” the man cautioned, but the aura dissipated back into the hazy cloud of darkness that hovered around. He gestured for the goblin’s to escort him and followed the small group of armed creatures away from the main lobby.

If all went well, there would be no need for violence.

“Exturbo Arduro!”

The small wooden door, which looked like it had been built for something the size of a human child, buckled underneath the powerful flash of flames. With a loud creak, the door was cracked and splintered underneath the force of the spell and exploded off its hinges, flying into the room in a shower of splintery shards. The fire followed it in, hissing and spluttering, before it all faded away into nothingness a second later.

“Well,” Harry remarked cheerfully from behind his thick cloak- a cloak which seemed to have a goblin spear or two protruding out from it. “That could have gone better.”

“They did try to kill us,” Verrine noted, idly marvelling at the sheer stamina that Harry was displaying. It wasn’t everyday that you saw a human walk around with a spear sticking out of his lung. “To be fair, it was self-defence.”

“Yeah, what’s-his-face is going to love that excuse,” Harry grumbled. “Well, there goes the stealth part of this operation. Still, let’s try to keep a low head. Maybe nobody heard this?”

“You can do stealth? Wonders never cease,” Verrine muttered under her breath.

Harry ducked underneath the burning cinders of the door frame and stepped into the office. “Alright!” He bellowed, brandishing his wand threateningly. “Tell me where the Black Family Vault is and I might let you live.”

He stopped, frowned and looked down, where his foot was currently parked in the remains of a shattered and oozing goblin head. The body’s whereabouts were unknown.

“Wait a moment,” Harry said a moment later. “I think I did that wrong.”

"I think it's 'ask questions first' and 'kill with fire later'," Verrine added wisely. She had taken off her hood, mostly because she claimed it felt stuffy, and her nose was wrinkled and she was sporting a sour expression. "My word, those goblin entrails smell."

"Do you think I can get a do-over?" Harry muttered, frowning at this latest development.

Movement flickered at the corner of his well-honed senses and with a blur, he flicked his wand. Something grey and squealing shot out from the umbrella stand as a silver flash of light struck it, causing it to explode with a loud bang. Verrine darted forward and grabbed hold of the goblin. It squealed, its legs racing furiously even as Verrine lifted it up- at a distance, and with a disgusted expression- and showed it to Harry.

"Do you think he knows anything?" Verrine wondered curiously.

"Avada Kedavra!" Harry responded, sending jet of green light over Verrine's shoulder and striking one of two goblin guards that had just stormed into the room with their spears held high.

It toppled over, while Verrine lashed out and clasped her free hand around the little creature's neck. She squeezed and there was a loud crack, before she lifted up the now-limp warrior and hurled him aside.

"Well, there goes the 'they didn't hear anything' plan," Harry muttered. He redirected his attention to Verrine and answered her question. "We can always ask."

Verrine wasn't paying attention as she wiped her free hand on her robes, looking disgusted. Harry didn't know if she got any blood on herself or if it was just the vain and snobbish side of Verrine reacting to touching something 'dirty'.

"Oi! You!" Harry demanded, levelling his wand at the goblin, which squirmed in Verrine's grip. "Where's the Black Family Vault?"

The goblin turned its scared and belligerent eyes on Harry and opened its mouth. What came out seemed to be a language made of

a strange guttural language, accompanied by the odd click and shower of spittle every now and then. Harry eyed the creature blankly as it finished its rant and turned his head to Verrine.

“You get any of that?” he asked curiously.

“Not a word.”

‘I never did get around to learning Gobbledegook,’ Meciél mused.

“Gobble-what?” Harry repeated.

‘The language of the goblins,’ Meciél explained. ‘Yes, yes, I know. I am not the one who named it.’

“We need to hurry,” Verrine urged, cocking her head and listening to the thumping footsteps that were approaching. There were dozens of them, all falling in the same beat in a perfect display of military march. “Those disgusting little things are on their way.”

“Right,” Harry said and pocketed his wand. He rubbed his hands cheerfully and suddenly looked quite pleased and eager. “This is cool. I finally get to practise. We stopped doing this after I melted this old guy’s head. Purely by accident, of course,” he added quickly.

“What are you talking about?” Verrine asked, perplexed.

Harry ignored her and lowered his hood, staring deeps into the eyes of the goblin. It eyed him back hatefully and Harry allowed a dark grin to cross his face.

“Do you understand English, you pathetic, inferior, ugly little bastard?” Harry asked quietly.

The goblin visibly tensed at the words, baring back his lips and displaying rows of sharp teeth.

“I think that’s a yes,” Harry murmured and narrowed his eyes. “Good. Now, listen to me carefully. Whatever you do, don’t think about the Black Family Vault. Do you understand me? Don’t think about it at all.

Don't think about how to get there from here either. Don't imagine escaping us and running there. Whatever you do, don't imagine opening the vault and finding the secret weapon that can destroy our kind with a single touch. Don't think about any of that!"

The goblin's eyes were wide open and it looked either puzzled or furious- Harry couldn't tell which. He didn't much care as he took a deep breath, focussed his mind and dove into that of the goblin. His body suddenly felt light and his vision darkened. There was this weird scratching noise in his head and he was well aware that he couldn't move any of his muscles. However, thanks to his practise with the Words of the Worlds, attempting to navigate the mind of a non-human creature was far easier than he had expected as Meciél guided him down the right neural networks.

He began to get some information, some flashes of memories, and an image here and there, all originating from the memories that Harry had stirred up about the Black Family Vault. That weird guttural language of the goblins filled his ears, his head hurt as more and more images bombarded his mind. He didn't even trying to decode it, he allowed Meciél to take it all in and use her superior mind to puzzle it out. After a few moments, Harry felt his body becoming heavier and heavier. The images were getting fuzzy, the voices inaudible, and with a great yank Harry pulled himself from the goblin's mind and shook his head dazedly.

"That was...weird," he commented faintly, shaking his head again. He frowned, flexing his hand and getting a feel for his muscles. "Still cool, though."

"Yes, I think the goblin didn't like it either," Verrine commended mildly, although there was an odd note in the tone of her voice.

Harry glanced at the goblin that Verrine was holding out and made a face.

"Yuck," he said.

The goblin was literally bleeding from every orifice, blood dripping down the hem of his expensive-looking suit. It dribbled from his

mouth, splattering on the ground along with huge blobs of mucus and other fleshy-coloured stuff that Harry didn't want to know. It was bad enough that his brains were literally melting out of his ears, the grey matter dissolving and bubbling under the brute force of Harry's mental attack. Verrine dropped the still-warm corpse with a disgusted shudder and took a step backwards while Harry whistled, feeling impressed.

"Now that would be useful in battle," he commented. "If only it didn't leave me as open as a hooker's legs."

Verrine muttered something under her breath that sounded suspiciously like 'fuck you' but when Harry turned to her, her face was impassive and she stood there, waiting for his next order.

"So, we gotta go left," Harry declared.

"Lead the way," Verrine said smoothly, gesturing at the doorway and bowing her head.

Harry strode out and Verrine made to follow him. Harry, however, quickly poked his head back in.

"Oh, Verrine?" He stated and pointed at the dead goblin. "Take that with you. We're going to need it."

Verrine's eye twitched as Harry disappeared but she obeyed and hoisted up the dead goblin before following Harry out the door.

The catacombs beneath Gringotts bank were actually quite beautiful, especially once you considered that they were created by some very ugly little beings. The walls were made of some strange black stone, magnified glossy rock that seemed to glitter the closer you stared at it. The tunnels were full of railway tracks and the two Denarians saw several carts whizzing by at unbelievable speeds more than once. Still, once Harry and Verrine arrived in the tunnels, the initial hectic rush and chaos died away as they made long hikes through the maze of rock. Sure, the goblin patrols that had been sent after them fought very well in their natural element, but Verrine was a master of earth-based magic. The few goblin patrols that they had met were instantly

crushed and pulverised by rows of jagged stone that split the earth with a mere gesture of Verrine's hand- much to her delight.

"Oh, this is marvellous!" Verrine exclaimed with a chuckle for the fifth time that day. There was something about the rocks that she could see that Harry, apparently, could not. "What is this material? I must take some samples back with me!"

"It's just rock," Harry muttered sourly.

"I've never seen something so receptive to my spells," Verrine continued, ignoring Harry's muttered comments as the two strolled down one of the large tunnels underneath the bank. "It's like it was deliberately designed to aid in earth-based magic!"

"Whoop-dee-fucking-doo," Harry uttered dryly.

"I wonder if it's a side-effect of the construction process," Verrine pondered thoughtfully. "These tunnels were definitely not made by human...er- goblin hands alone. I wish I could ask one of them."

"You're about to get your chance," Harry remarked and Verrine blinked, tearing her eyes away from the walls and roof and glancing at him in confusion. He smiled mysteriously. "Wait for it..."

Suddenly, from the other end of a tunnel, a huge fireball flared up into existence and surged towards them. Harry eyed the green flames amusedly, recognising it as Gubraithian Fire. Verrine stiffened and Harry saw her sink down into the rock like it was water. He scowled, eying her disappearing form indignantly.

"Hey, what about me?" He asked. He shook his head and scoffed underneath his hood. "Man, nobody ever cares about me."

'I care about you, Harry,' Meciél said sincerely. She paused. 'Do you feel better now?'

"No," Harry said miserably, although the quirk on his lips. He stood fast in the path of rushing flames. "She took my donought."

‘What?’

That was the last thing Harry said before he was consumed by the Everlasting Fire. The green fireball struck him, struggled for a brief moment and kept on billowing outwards, unlikely to be stopped by as small of a physical object as Harry’s body. The fire rolled forward and Harry stepped out of the green flames, idly brushing some of the scorch marks out of his thick cloak.

“T’ch.” Harry spat out in disgust “Please. Like a little bit of fire is going to hurt me.”

Verrine cautiously climbed up from out of the ground next him, eying the surroundings carefully. When she saw Harry, whose very figure radiated annoyance, she managed a bright smile.

“I knew you’d survive,” she said, sounding satisfied.

“I’m sure you did,” Harry remarked dryly. “C’mon, let’s keep walking.”

After several more fireballs, Harry and Verrine were left alone. Whoever was monitoring them or setting the traps on them obviously saw the futility in that particular type of trap. Harry kept a sharp lookout for something else but they arrived at an intersection unmolested.

“Which way?” Verrine asked.

Harry frowned, trying to make sense of the information he had gleaned from the goblin’s mind. Overall, he had gotten a rough guide but a lot of it had been sensations and feelings that the goblin had experienced at specific sections of the vaults. Meciél had remarked it was something to do with magnetism or something and while she could detect those types of pulses, Harry had been literally standing above it before he knew it was the right one.

“Left,” Harry decided. “We’ll go left.”

“Are you sure?” Verrine sounded suspicious and Harry rolled his eyes.

"If we're wrong, we'll go back," he growled between gritted teeth. "Seriously, do you have to nag and whine over every little thing we do?"

The two set off down the tunnel, an angry scowl on Verrine's face as she rounded on Harry.

"What's that meant to mean?" she demanded.

"It means, Verrine" Harry said with great care. "That you are what is known to the world as a 'whiny little bitch'." He made a face and continued. "Ooooh! My feet hurt! I dun' like the dark! It smells! I wanna go home! Mu-um! Harry hit me!"

"You're funny," Verrine snapped and, with a huff, looked the other way.

"I know," said Harry, feeling pleased with himself.

He took a step forward and paused, his eyes shooting up and trying to pierce through the darkness ahead to no avail. Verrine stopped a few steps later, also looking ahead with a frown on her delicate face. There was somebody ahead of them. Just because Harry couldn't see them didn't mean he couldn't hear them. Enhanced hearing or not, the tunnels echoed noise rather well.

"There's a party ahead of us, one-hundred and seven metres," Verrine informed him tightly. She tapped the ground with her foot and frowned. "I'm sensing the vibrations from at least twenty or so goblins...they're wearing clanking armour. There's also something else, much larger and much heavier."

Harry nodded. He could hear it, the rough and harsh breathing of whatever lay ahead.

"Is there any way around them?" He asked, already knowing the answer. Verrine shook his head and Harry grimaced. "Ah, man," he whined. "I am so getting yelled at."

He stopped and drew out his wand. Hellfire leapt up on his command and the runes flashed with crimson light, reflecting off the glossy walls to create a rather eerie glow.

“Allow me,” Harry said, not sounding as dismayed at the prospect of violence as he had a few minutes ago.

He turned his head towards the tunnel, lifted his wand and drew back his head. Inhaling loudly, Harry blew on the tip of his wand and let his eyes flash with fire. The tunnel in front of him exploded in a blast of heat and fire. Fiendfyre wrapped into existence, twisting and flailing as it sought to break its master’s hold on it but all for naught. Under Harry’s direction, it took the guise of a fully-fledged bonewrym, triple Harry’s height. Verrine took a startled step backwards, her eyes widened, while Harry flicked his wand and sent the massive beast of cursed flame down the hallway.

The ground shuddered as the bonewrym’s pace broke out into a charge. The brilliant glow it was giving off dissolved the darkness that hid the party of goblins. It was a bit hard to see past the Fiendfyre but Harry smiled thinly as the sounds of inhuman screams and clashing metal filled the air. He opened his mouth, then paused and gagged. A quick tap of his wand created a blue-domed bubble over both his and Verrine’s head and modification of the Gust Charm drew in the remaining oxygen.

“Sorry,” Harry said a tad sheepishly. “Sometimes I forget that fire likes oxygen.”

Verrine nodded stiffly, her eyes glued down at the other end of the tunnel.

“Can all wand-wizards create such powerful spells so easily?” she wondered out loud.

“Nope,” Harry answered and grinned. “Just the really good ones- like me. C’mon, let’s go see if there’s anything left.”

There was. The Fiendfyre beast had broken apart, probably because there had been nothing to burn oxygen-wise, but the damage had

been done to the platoon. Most of the goblins were gone, although there were some scattered ashes that signified where they had died. Two goblins remained, both on their knees and gasping for air.

With a sideways glance at Harry, Verrine clasped her hands together and muttered something in a nonsensical tongue. The ground shuddered as two pillars of rock cracked the smooth surface and shot up from the depths. Harry watched, slightly impressed, as the pillars of rock crumbled apart until they resembled a pair of arms, albeit arms that might have suited a troll rather than a human. The arms grabbed the two goblins, picked them up and slammed them against each wall in a sickening squelch. Verrine's hands broke apart and the rocky hands crumbled into dirt.

"Very nice," Harry complimented. He scratched his head. "I don't think I could have done- whoa. What's that?"

Looming before them, its iron collar twisted and melted and its scales blackened with ash and soot, was a dragon that was at least twice as big as Harry's Fiendfyre construct. It appeared to be in pain but one of its eyes shot opened and it turned its head to gaze at Harry.

Harry stared back and was slightly relieved that he could only see bestial intelligence within them. He took a step back and raised his wand as the dragon let out a heart-stopping roar, the sound booming off the walls and down the catacombs for kilometres.

"Avada Kedavra!"

The dragon's roar ended with a sudden and rotten exhale of breath that ruffled Verrine's and Harry's robes, as well as soaked them in dragon spittle. The green light had soared directly into its open mouth and, without so much as another sound it collapsed to the ground with a terrible crash. The walls and floors shuddered and some dust fell down from the ceiling. Harry wobbled and wavered on his feet while Verrine didn't seem to have any trouble in keeping her balance until the tremors finally stopped.

"Huh," Harry uttered, staring at the dead dragon quizzically while Verrine looked down at herself with utter disgust. He absently

scraped some of the dragon drool off his face. "I don't see what all the fuss is about these things, really. One curse and bam- it's dead."

"This is..." Verrine started, sounding furious, and stopped. "Why am I doing this again?"

"Because I ordered you to," Harry responded lazily.

He scooped up some of the thick translucent goo off his robes and flung it at the other Denarian. Verrine evaded the missile with a shriek and Harry chuckled.

"C'mon, Verrine," Harry said lazily and started to climb over the dead dragon, which was blocking most of the path. "We've got..." He paused and frowned, squatting on the dead dragon's hide.

"What is it?" Verrine asked cautiously.

"Nothing, nothing," Harry waved off dismissively. "It's just that...we need to go back that way."

He pointed in the direction that they had just come from.

"We went the wrong way?"

"Yep," Harry answered cheerfully.

Verrine twitched.

Thirty minutes, fifty goblins and two dragons later, Harry and Verrine stood in front of a rather small wooden door. Verrine eyed the battered and water-stained wood looking rather sceptical.

"Are you sure that's it?" she asked doubtfully. "It doesn't look like an entrance to a great big vault full of gold."

"Well, open it and find out." Harry rolled his eyes.

Verrine moved forward and raised a hand, as if she intended to open the door, but she froze as Harry surged forward and gripped her arm in a tight grip. She turned her head quizzically as Harry grinned.

“Right, forgot to tell you,” he said cheerfully. “You can’t actually touch that door. If you do, well, you’ll spend the next few hundred years thinking you’re a rock at the bottom of an ocean. Not only will it be boring, but you’ll spend most of your time drowning.”

Verrine tried to slip out of Harry’s grasp with no luck.

“Then how do we open it?” she questioned.

“Only a Gringotts goblin can open the door,” Harry explained. “So, I hope you still have that dead goblin I told you to carry.”

Verrine froze, her eyes wide, and Harry’s smile faded. The grip on her arm tightened just a tad.

“Verrine?” He asked carefully. “You do still have it, right? I’m pretty sure I remember telling you to pick it up and take it with you.”

“I thought you were just trying to mock...” Verrine trailed off with a hiss of pain as Harry’s grip tightened immensely. Her bones felt like they were bending inwards from the pressure and she bit down on her lip hard as Harry stared at her with cold, humourless green eyes.

“Verrine,” the Denarian Lord said, his voice dripping with malice. “When I tell you to do something, you do it. Do you understand me?”

“Y-Yes!” Verrine hissed.

Harry eyed her for a moment longer then let her arm go. She immediately cradled it to her chest as Harry reached into his thick cloak and pulled out a pair of bloodied goblin arms. Verrine eyed them askance as Harry smiled chillingly.

“You’re lucky I saw you drop it,” he said, and then all of his anger faded away, leaving behind the cheeky persona that she had grown accustomed to. He grinned. “Otherwise I’d have probably killed you

here and left coin deep down in these tunnels, to be alone in the Void for the rest of eternity.”

The cheer in his voice did not stop her from feeling the chill of his words, no matter how playful his banter was, and Verrine kept her head bowed as Harry pressed the two goblin arms on the door. The door, instead swinging opening, literally melted away, revealing a cave-like opening absolutely crammed with golden coins and goblets, jewels, suits of armour, vials of brightly-coloured potions and a dusty book here and there. Harry carelessly tossed the goblin arms aside and strode in, Verrine trailing behind him as she nursed her arm and her pride.

“Fucking hell,” Harry breathed as a soft golden glow illuminated his features. “It’s treasure!”

He bounded forward with all the playfulness of a child, ducking and peeking at everything he saw. “Ooh, shiny!” he exclaimed at a large pile of gems. “Hang on, look at this!” he gasped as he saw a large gleaming crown, still attached to the remains of a human skull.

It took Verrine a couple of moments to work up her nerve.

“Perhaps we should focus on our objective?” she proposed faintly.

“What? Oh, I suppose.”

Harry tore his eyes from the large piles of treasure, although the greedy gleam hadn’t left them just yet. After a few moments of pacing about the large piles and search, Harry looked up and grinned.

“Accio!” He called out.

The cup didn’t budge. Harry rolled his eyes and summoned a gust of wind. The cup teetered on the edge of the large pile and rolled down with a clatter, stopping right by Harry’s feet. Harry picked it up and brandished it at Verrine triumphantly.

He opened his mouth to speak but abruptly stopped and cocked his head. There was something niggling into his mind, something that felt

like liquid grease slithering over his brain. Whatever it was, it quickly fell into the raging fires that burned within Harry day and night and Harry blinked.

“Did somebody just scream like a little girl?” He murmured in confusion.

‘It’s nothing that you need to worry about,’ Meciél placated. Harry could feel the pleasure and satisfaction simmering from the Fallen as she continued. ‘You belong to me, beloved. No petty artefact will sway my mind.’

“Okay,” Harry drawled slowly, blinking. He reached into his cloak and pulled out a similar cup to the one he was holding. Carelessly, he threw it over his shoulder. “There we are,” he said with a grin, tucking back the old

He focussed on Verrine and grinned. “It’s time for the fun part. Verrine, as a reward for your services, you can have as much as you can carry from the Vault.”

Verrine’s eyes widened and she took in the obvious wealth that surrounded her. As ancient as she was, she understood and appreciated materialistic wealth as much as the next person. While Harry wondered over to one stack, Verrine strolled over to a dusty table and gazed at a gleaming crown and the human skull. She picked it up, but a second later, though, she dropped it with a sizzle and a hiss, and then yelped when something heavy hit her foot.

“What’s this?” Verrine snapped, staring at her scalded hand. She glanced down and looked surprised when she saw a replica of the crown lying next to the original. “There are two of them?”

A loud crash interrupted her and she whirled around. Her eyes widened when she saw a pile of golden coins literally growing up on the other side of the vault. More and more coins appeared with a soft pop, dozens of them, hundreds, even, crashing down on each other in a wave of tinkling noise. The pile grew to be twice the size of Verrine before it abruptly buckled and exploded in a wave of flying coins. Verrine ducked as gold went flying everywhere, crashing on

tables and piles of other gold. When she stood up, she saw Harry climbing out of the pile and panting.

“Fucking hell!” he cursed. “Death by gold- now that would have been embarrassing.”

“Security measures?” Verrine theorised.

“Probably,” Harry grumbled. He looked irritated and grumpy as he kicked a pile of gold and growled under his breath. “Looks like we can’t touch any of this stuff- unless you know how to break these types of enchantments.”

At Verrine’s shake, Harry moaned desperately.

“Oh, c’mon!” He whined. “This really, really sucks.”

“How come you could touch that?” Verrine asked, gesturing at the dull cup that Harry was carrying. She brushed her fingers along one of the tomes and jumped back when it multiplied, sending them all crashing to the floor.

“If it is what I think it is then the creator of it probably wouldn’t let the goblins touch it,” Harry said grimly. “It had its own little defence which Meciél pretty much killed.”

Verrine wasn’t looking at him and her head had shot towards the still-open door of the vault. She frowned and concentrated, feeling the vibrations through the floor and analysing them in her own unique way. It was a skill that not even Meciél could help Harry perform.

“They’re coming,” Verrine said abruptly. “Hundreds of them.”

“Shit,” Harry snapped. He glared at the gold in front of him, mentally cursing its gleaming glow for taunting him like that, and came to a decision. “Verrine, take my hand. We’re leaving.”

Verrine held out her hand and Harry clasped it. He reached into his thick cloak and pulled out a small metal instrument, something that looked like it belonged in Dumbledore’s office.

“What’s that?” Verrine asked curiously.

“It’s something that should get us out of here,” Harry explained. “If it works, that is.”

“And if it doesn’t?”

“Then we get the extremely fun and bloody option of fighting our way to the front door,” Harry remarked cheerfully. “Usually I’d be all for it but Dumbledore’s gonna be pissed at me as it is now.”

“Dumbledore?” Verrine asked in confusion. “Who’s that and why can he order you around?”

“Hey, he doesn’t order me,” Harry grumbled, suddenly looking angry. “He makes a suggestion and, to be honest, they’re usually pretty good. I mostly ignore them though and end up getting yelled at- but he comes back for my help anyway.”

“Sorry,” Verrine muttered.

Harry ignored her and pressed down on the small latch of the instrument. He didn’t know what Dumbledore had done to the portkey to make it work here in such an obviously warded area, but he was grateful for when he felt a tug at his navel and disappeared from the vault just moments before it was stormed by goblins.

A/N: Again, thanks to the DLP people for their help with this chapter. I'll start the next one tomorrow afternoon and will hopefully have it out in a couple of days. For those who've been pointing out grammar mistakes that make it to - thanks. I'm going to spend an afternoon one day going through them all and fixing them all up. Enjoy.

Harry hated Portkeys. It wasn't the fact that at times he would be handling garbage and rotten fruit and other disgusting objects (really, what kind of wizard created a spell that worked best on other people's trash?). It wasn't because of the falling and twirling sensation- in fact, he found that the most enjoyable part of using a portkey. What he actually hated was the split-second after it was all over and he had arrived at the other end. In that split second, he was defenceless. Even with Meciell boosting his neurons and whatnot, it still took his body a couple of moments to readjust itself to the real world. In that time, he had absolutely no control over his muscles.

So, when Harry and Verrine departed from the portkey that led that from the vaults of Gringotts, it wasn't surprising that the two of them slammed into each other as they both wobbled about on their feet. Harry would have actually enjoyed the sensation of Verrine's rather attractive body pressed up against him- although he'd never admit it to her face- if she hadn't catapulted the both of them into a nearby bookshelf. Harry winced in pain as the two collapsed on the shelf, which wobbled backwards and forwards, knocking loose the heavy tomes that resided in. Harry had just managed to open his eyes when he saw a book that must have had at least ten thousand pages in it tip precariously off the shelf and fall.

He reflexively moved his head- only to find that it was trapped between the bookcase and Verrine's back. A moment later, the heavy book fell on his face and there was a loud crack. The rest of the books soon joined it.

Harry held his broken and bloodied nose and growled. He wrenched one arm one arm from underneath Verrine's squirming form and pushed the books off his face.

He glanced around and pushed a couple of books away from the huge fallen pile that surrounded him. After moving a heavy tome entitled 'The Laws of the 1832 Ministry of Magic and How They Were a Really Bad Idea', Verrine's head popped up, gasping for air. Harry took in her frazzled hair, her panting tongue and her scrunched up cloak and sniggered.

"Shut up," Verrine snapped as she moved one of the books off her legs. "Whatever that was, I am not doing it..." she trailed off as she glanced behind Harry, her eyes widening. "...again."

Harry looked over his shoulder and inwardly winced. They had arrived in Dumbledore's study, where the aged wizard was leaning back in his chair as he talked to a floating head in the fireplace. Verrine absolutely bogged at that- even a Fallen could be surprised, it seemed- while Harry took it to be another one of the stupid ideas that the wand-wizards had thought of.

"Who is that, Albus?" the head demanded.

Harry thought he looked a little bit like a predator, with his red-streaked tawny hair, his dark, penetrating gaze behind a pair wire-rimmed spectacles. He had rather curly long hair, which fell to his neck, and a splattering of facial hair just below his chin that slightly resembled the mane of a lion. Whoever the wizard was, he was looking at Harry and Verrine sharply.

Dumbledore turned his head away from the other wizard and regarded Harry rather severely. There was some kind of message in his eyes but Harry didn't pick it up as he tried his best to throw some of the books off him. He was scrabbling about in his thick cloak for something as Dumbledore turned back to the man in the fireplace.

"Minister Scrimgeour, this is Harry Potter," Dumbledore introduced politely, although Harry- having known Dumbledore for a bit of time now- detected the rather unenthusiastic note in his voice. "Harry, meet the Minister of Magic: Rufus Scrimgeour."

"Yo," Harry greeted, lazily waving his free hand and then dismissing the man without another thought and holding his nose with the other.

Without so much as a wince, he reset the broken bone and nodded in satisfaction.

He went back to his cloak and with a triumphant 'ha!' pulled out his wand. It only took a quick swish and flick and the books zoomed up off the ground and back onto the shelf. Harry shook his head quickly, shaking some of the dust out of his hair, and then bounded up off the ground. Verrine was right behind him as she stood stiffly and awkwardly.

"Why is Harry Potter in your office, Dumbledore?" Scrimgeour asked, not even bothering to hide his suspicion.

"Visiting," Dumbledore replied pleasantly. "Now, if we could get back to the topic on hand. As far as I am aware, Lord Voldemort had no immediate plans to raid or attack Gringotts or Diagon Alley as a whole. That said, I am just a mere Headmaster..."

Scrimgeour snorted incredulously.

"...so, although I am flattered that you would think I had some knowledge, I'm afraid I cannot help you," Dumbledore finished as if he hadn't been interrupted. "Be sure that I will immediately let you know if I hear of any Death Eater plots or Lord Voldemort's schemes in the staffroom."

Scrimgeour nodded his head stiffly and, after giving Harry and Verrine one last measuring look, disappeared from the fireplace with a puff of green flame. Dumbledore took a deep breath and swung around on his chair, facing Harry and Verrine with steeped fingers. He glanced at the portraits and slightly inclined his head. The portraits, however, were already in the process of leaving silently.

"Harry," Dumbledore began when they had left. "I'm really quite sorry for your predicament. I was unaware that your formal education ended when you went missing. How was I to know that you could mistake the word 'discretion' for 'bloodbath'?"

"Hang on." Harry frowned and stared at the Headmaster incredulously. "Are you getting bitchy with me?"

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair but kept his calm gaze on Harry. Harry stared straight back into those infuriating eyes, his fists clenching by his sides as the anger welled up within him. Instead of continuing, however, Dumbledore turned his gaze to Verrine. There was nothing insidious on the old man's face but Verrine twitched, as if suddenly feeling very wary.

Harry knew the feeling.

"Ah, Dumbledore, this is Verrine," Harry motioned to her with his hands. "Verrine, this is Headmaster Dumbledore. He is one of the few people still left alive that could kick the crap out of me if he so choose to, so be very, very nice to him."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Headmaster," Verrine said smoothly and managed a rather graceful curtsy in her thick robes. She brushed some of the hair out her eyes and gave the old man a very beautiful smile as she held out her hand. "You must be Harry's boss, then."

Dumbledore chuckled as he rose out of his seat.

"I wouldn't go that far, Miss Verrine," he said. "And it is a pleasure to meet you too."

He grasped Verrine's dainty hand and lowered his head, his beard rubbing gently across her skin as he kissed it. Verrine smiled coyly as Dumbledore released the hand and, still smiling politely, continued.

"No, the relationship between Harry and I could be contoured as that between two allied parties," he said. "We meet every once in a while and organize our strategies against our common enemies. It can be quite tiresome, to be honest." His blue eyes twinkled madly. "Harry can be quite the handful."

"Don't I know it," Verrine responded smugly. She looked like she was enjoying the cultured exchange. Her smile disappeared at Dumbledore's next words though.

“So tell me, Miss Verrine, are you the human host working in collusion with the Fallen Angel that has bound itself to you, or are you the Fallen Angel who has crushed the human spirit within that body?”

Verrine tilted her head as the politeness left her face. For a moment, she looked completely lifeless, as if everything human had left then. Then, as if remembering herself, her face relaxed and she smiled, although it was a little dimmer than before.

“I am the Fallen, wizard,” she said quietly.

“Ah, I see,” Dumbledore said. “An associate of Harry’s, I presume?”

“He spared my life on the provision that I serve him,” Verrine explained tightly. “So yes, I am an associate of sorts.”

“And aren’t I regretting it as I stand here and listen to you two talk about me like I wasn’t here,” Harry interjected cheerfully. He had shrugged off his large, thick cloak and was wearing his standard jeans and dark jacket. “What do you want, Dumbledore?”

Dumbledore ignored him and reached into his purple and silver robes. He pulled out a large, feathered quill and handed it to Verrine. The other Fallen took it gingerly, as if she expected it to explode in her face.

“I’m afraid that Harry and I have quite a bit to discuss,” he said politely. “That is a portkey. Merely say the word ‘Oddmont’ and you will be taken to London Central Station. I assume you can make your own way home from there.”

Verrine looked at Harry and he nodded.

“Go,” he commanded.

Verrine whispered the word and was gone without so much as a flash or pop, leaving the office empty save for Dumbledore and Harry. The latter casually strolled forward and took a seat. With deliberate ease, he put his feet up on Dumbledore’s desk and met the other wizard’s eyes fearlessly.

The office was quiet for a few moments as Dumbledore and Harry stared at each other. Then:

"You have caused a national emergency, Harry," Dumbledore informed him quietly.

"They started it," Harry immediately protested.

"The occupants of Gringotts were quick to call in the Ministry, despite claims from the goblins that everything was under control," Dumbledore said.

"They jammed a fucking spear into my lung," Harry continued, waving his hands around in an attempt to imitate the act. "They were all like 'Stab!' and I was bleeding and there was this gold thing in me and it bloody hurt."

"Naturally, the new got out to the public," Dumbledore said as if he hadn't heard Harry. "Even while you were still in there, a small mob formed outside Gringotts demanding access to their gold. The goblins refused and a rather dense wizard lost his arms trying to slip past. Thankfully, nearby Hit Wizard patrols were able to reattach them."

"Yeah, well, not my problem," Harry muttered sourly, folding his arms and looking away.

"I just want to know one thing, Harry," Dumbledore explained. "Tell me, did you even attempt to try a more diplomatic or subtle approach, or did you just blast in there like you usually do in such situations?"

"Okay, that's it," Harry declared abruptly. He unfolded his arms and slapped his hands across on the desk as he leaned forward. "You," he started fiercely, jabbing his finger towards Dumbledore, who sat there impassively. "You can't send me on missions to attack impenetrable fortresses or prisons or banks and then yell at me when the shit hits the fan! If you want something done your way then you can go and do it yourself. If you want something done, call me."

Dumbledore took a deep breath and exhaled.

“Now, as I was saying,” Harry continued, sitting back down in his chair. “We went to have a chat with the manager- we were invited,” he hastily added. “Then the guards must have gotten paranoid or spooked or something because they just attacked us. We defended ourselves and that was that.”

“I see,” Dumbledore said quietly.

His words did nothing to make Harry feel better and the Denarian Lord scowled, feeling annoyed and disgruntled. Dumbledore’s sometimes blatant superiority-complex really rubbed him the wrong way at times.

Perhaps Dumbledore could sense the resentment in Harry, because he sighed and sagged in his chair.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” he said solemnly. “You are right. If I truly wanted to avoid this type of situation then I should not have asked for your help. My attempts and the attempts of my agents failed. Perhaps this way was the only way we could have gotten hold of the cup. Speaking of which...”

Harry accepted the apology graciously, that is, he didn’t throw it back in Dumbledore’s face like he usually would. He did, however, let a rather pleased smirk cross his face, but it died down as he reached into his jacket and pulled out the cup. He placed it on the table and watched with a pleased smile as Dumbledore leaned forward, staring at it intently. His good hand rose, hovering over the blackened remains of his other arm that was hidden under his robes- as if remembering an old wound.

Dumbledore inspected the golden cup carefully, his eyes running over from the two finely-wrought handles to the engraved badger in the side. After a few minutes, he leaned back in his chair, apparently satisfied that it was the real deal.

“Were there any complications when you touched it?” he asked curiously and lifted up his blackened arm. “As you may have guessed, the protections on the Horcrux I found were quite formidable.”

"There was some kind of mental attack, I think, but Meciell took care of it pretty quickly," Harry answered. "So, how do we kill it? The soul in it, I mean."

"We simply destroy the cup, which may or may not be such a simple matter," Dumbledore said gravely.

"Is that it?" Harry asked and scoffed. He took out his wand and grinned. "Let me handle it. Effer-

"Harry, no!" Dumbledore snapped.

Harry paused but it was too late. The cup, perhaps reacting to the appearance of a magical focus or perhaps sensing the intent in the room, gave an odd creak. A sudden sloshing of water filled the room and Harry blinked. There was water bubbling from the rim of the cup. Harry frowned and scratched his head with the tip of his wand as the water crept over Dumbledore's desk and started to drip to the floor.

"What's that?" He asked in confusion.

The water was bubbling now, boiling beneath the heat of some force that Harry couldn't see. He lifted his wand and frowned, suddenly feeling very wary. This was a Horcrux of Lord Voldemort, a little snippet of his soul. Who knew what the man had done to protect it.

Dumbledore was regarding the water carefully and suddenly, as if seeing something that Harry couldn't, he jumped out of his seat. A split-second later, the water rose up in the disturbing likeness of a viper's head and lashed out where Dumbledore had just been sitting. The chair was torn apart by the force of the blow and the watery viper leaned back and dissolved back into the puddle.

"That was interesting," Harry commented idly. "Can we kill it now?"

"I wonder," Dumbledore was muttering, not paying attention to Harry.

He flicked his wand and summoned a small trinket off one of the shelves. He deftly caught it and, peering closely from behind his half-

moon glasses, he threw the small metal object at the golden cup. The object soared through the air but the watery snake rose up and lunged at it, crushing it in its powerful jaws.

Dumbledore threw a few more objects towards the Horcrux at faster and faster speeds, watching carefully and with the curious expression of an experimenter as the snake rose up and crushed them all. On the last attempt, the snake managed to snatch three of the objects out of the air but a fourth managed to break through. In an instant, a second head rose up out of the water and deftly caught it between its jaws.

“My, my, this is fascinating,” Dumbledore said, rubbing his beard thoughtfully. “Lord Voldemort really is quite the genius, especially when you consider that this Horcrux was created a few years after he left Hogwarts.”

Harry was looking and feeling annoyed as he leant back on one of the bookcases.

“What are you doing?” He demanded.

Dumbledore started and gave Harry a strange look.

“Oh, yes,” he said with dawning remembrance and chuckled. “Forgive me, Harry. I can become rather focussed when I am presented with a problem such as this. It is one of my many flaws.”

“Do you ever wonder why you lost that arm of yours then?” Harry remarked a moment later. He held his hands up defensively as Dumbledore shot him a glance. “Hey, I’m just putting it out there. You should spend less time concentrating on the academics of that thing and more time remembering that it could crush your body with a single hit.”

Dumbledore actually looked a little chagrined. Harry felt smug at the sight of his suitably chastised expression and sniggered.

"Alas, perhaps you are right," Dumbledore sighed. His eyes flashed for a brief second and his beard twitched. "I should especially take notice if you are advising me that I may be too rash."

Harry stopped sniggering and scowled.

"Geez, blow up a few things and you never hear the end of it."

"A bank," Dumbledore interjected pleasantly. "You blew up a bank."

"Parts of a bank," Harry corrected sharply. "Look, can we just get rid of this thing already?"

"Ah, yes, the Horcrux," Dumbledore remarked. "Yes. It has quite an ingenious curse on it. It is hard to tell of the curse has been tied in with the original enchantments and spells cast on the cup- although, given its rather serpentine nature I doubt it."

"So we kill it we Fiendfyre?" Harry interrupted tiredly.

"Yes, I believe that would be the best option," Dumbledore nodded sagely. "This particular spell, if you had noticed, has a particular proximity diameter- it will react if any foreign object comes within a certain distance. It is also able to form multiple avenues of attack, which makes any short-ranged physical assault to be much unwise."

Harry rolled his eyes and opened his mouth to speak but, much to his disgruntlement, he was cut off.

"Voldemort would have had to incorporate runic channels in the construction of the spell," Dumbledore mused as an afterthought. "Unless- I wonder, could it be a modification of previous spells? Serpensortia and Aguamenti would be the most likely candidates, given Tom's age at the time. Hmm, perhaps it is a mixture of the two spells, although I will admit that they are not very compatible. He may have very well decided that himself and used those spells as inspiration for it in the first place...Harry?"

Harry, who had been steadfastly ignoring the pondering Headmaster, held a fist of Fiendfyre in his hand. He seemed to be unaware of ignorant of the magical theory that stated that the cursed flame should have melted his skin to the bone by now. He grinned, the fire twisting and flowing around on his palm, the ferocity of the flames held back only by Harry's will. Without so much as another look at Dumbledore, Harry hurled the ball of Fiendfyre at the cup.

The Fiendfyre, partially out of Harry's control, gobbled up the matter in the air and grew four times its original self in the single split-second after it had left Harry's hand and before it reached the perimeter of the puddle of water. It passed the threshold and a yet another snake of water rose up and lashed at the flames. Steam filled the air as the Fiendfyre writhed and twisted in the viper's grip. Then, even as more water rushed to sustain the defensive curse, the Fiendfyre morphed and changed shape.

The fire itself became a serpent of many heads. Three lashed out at the water, crashing against their watery replicas, while another lanced towards the cup. The fiery snake opened its mouth and latched onto the handle of the cup. More Fiendfyre joined it, latching onto and wrapping around the golden cup.

Under Dumbledore and Harry's gaze, the cup immediately began to give off smoke. The watery spell fell apart and dissipated in a cloud of steam as the cup began to shudder. Then, with a sound that sounded much like an unearthly scream, the cup sizzled and dissolved in a puddle of molten gold as the Fiendfyre began to consume its mass as its own.

"There," Harry said smugly, dispelling the Fiendfyre with a flick of his wand and some superb mental control. All that remained of the Horcrux was a blackened, ash-covered and water stained desk. "The problem is solved."

"So I can see," Dumbledore remarked.

"I suppose that's it then," Harry said, suddenly feeling a surge of victory.

It seemed that he hadn't really been giving much thought to Lord Voldemort himself during the past few weeks. Sure, he had taken out a couple of Death Eater's but that was it, really. Dumbledore had been the one managing the front while Harry searched for the Order of Blackened Denarius. It was good to strike a blow against the pale-faced wizard, Harry decided, even if the asshole didn't even know it was happening.

"Anyway, I'm late, so I better go," Harry said lazily. "Though, just out of curiosity- how many more of these do I have to...er... commandeer for the greater good?"

"I believe there are only two or three left now, Harry," Dumbledore answered as he began to fix up the damage left to his office with short flicks of his wand. He summoned the ash and carefully placed it in a small bag, no doubt to study later.

"You better not get all worked up on the other ones," Harry warned and crossed his arms. "Really, the way you were brownnosing before really got to me. For a moment, I thought you wanted...ah, how would you put it? Conduct sexual relations with a former student?"

"Harry, my dear boy," Dumbledore chuckled. "You are not my type."

Harry visibly started and his eyes went wide.

"Oh...wait, I wasn't...you..." He trailed off and scowled. "You fucking old coot! That's not what I meant!"

Dumbledore chuckled as Harry sniffed disdainfully and turned his back. As the Denarian strode to the exit, Dumbledore's laughter stopped.

"Harry?" Dumbledore called out and Harry paused.

There was a strange inflection in the other wizard's voice and Harry turned back, noting a strange and speculative look in the old man's gaze that Harry hadn't encountered for months now.

"What is it?" Harry asked blandly, keeping his own speculation off his face.

"Did you, perchance, understand anything that those serpents were saying?"

"The water ones?" Harry asked for confirmation and shrugged at Dumbledore's nod. "They weren't saying anything- just hissing like they were, well, you know, snakes."

Dumbledore nodded, looking oddly thoughtfully. "Thank you, Harry," he said.

Harry waited for an explanation but none came as Dumbledore turned back to cleaning up his office. In the end, Harry just rolled his eyes and left the other wizard to his contemplations. It seemed that Dumbledore was getting stranger and stranger the more Harry got to know him. Then again, perhaps he was just that type of person.

A short time later, Harry found himself relaxing in a very cosy armchair- a crimson one, to be specific- while he enjoyed the view in front of him. Amanda, clad in some kind of tight exercise clothing, was running through a series of rapid-paced spells, breathing hard as sweat poured from her brow. Harry didn't know what was better- seeing Amanda let off a spell that would have caused the victim some pretty nasty feelings when his or her skin started melting off or seeing Amanda in a tight white shirt that was rapidly becoming damp with sweat.

"Man, this was so worth it," Harry muttered and grinned to himself. He glanced up, where Meciél's illusion was lounging on the arm of his chair, running a hand through his hair. "Well, it was worth it for me. I'm not sure what you'll get out of it, but I have been told that I'm selfish."

"Well, I suppose she does have a nice arse," Meciél conceded, her silver eyes raking over Amanda carefully. "For a Knight's daughter." She amended. "I used to prefer my women to be less...rigid."

Harry choked, his eyes widening, and he swung his gaze back to Meciél. She was already gone, though, leaving behind a fragrance of sweet perfume that was so undeniably hers and a soft, tinkling laughter.

‘Hey, Meciél?’ Harry thought. ‘What starts with ‘C’ and ends with ‘ocktease’?’

Meciél just laughed and Harry grumpily returned to reality, just as Amanda finished the last of her demonstrations by twirling on her feet as if avoiding a set of spells and blasting one of the few remaining desks apart with a flash of silver light and a loud cry of ‘Effodio!’.

Harry watched the desk shatter under the force of the spell speculatively but quickly cleared his expression when she turned to him, her skin flushed with exertion and her blonde hair mussed up, barely held together in her ponytail. Her eyes, though, were sparkling.

“So how’d I go?” Amanda asked, trying and failing to add some nonchalance to her question.

“I’ll admit it fair and square,” Harry said, idly bringing his thumb to his mouth and chewing at the nail. “You are, without a doubt, much better than you were last year.”

Amanda beamed.

“In fact,” Harry continued. “I’d go so far as to say that, power and skill wise, you’re about on the same level as...” He paused and Amanda listened intently. “This chewed up fingernail,” Harry concluded.

“Ha, ha, ha,” Amanda uttered sarcastically.

“Actually,” Harry continued thoughtfully. “Now that I think about, I think the fingernail is more useful. I mean, I could use it to pick a lock...”

“Alohamora!”

Amada whirled around and pointed her wand at the door. The lock made an odd clicking noise and, barely suppressing a smile, Amanda turned back to Harry pointedly.

“...I could slit somebody’s throat with it,” Harry continued.

“Sectumsemptra!” Amanda incanted and swiped her wand as if it were a sword. A silver light flashed out and gouged a neat line through one of the wooden desks.

“What was that?” Harry asked with a frown.

“Found it in a book,” Amanda explained

“Ah, okay.” Harry nodded. “Er...well, with this fingernail, I could start a fire...”

“Incendio!”

“And,” Harry continued, narrowing his eyes. “I could get a blonde schoolgirl to take off her shirt and show me her breasts.”

“Yeah, not happening, Harry,” Amanda remarked dryly. Harry scowled but it faded as Amanda continued. “Besides, no you couldn’t.”

Harry cocked his head.

“Was that a challenge? That sounded like challenge. That wasn’t a challenge, was it?” Harry asked gleefully. Amanda continued to look stubborn and Harry grinned. “Fine. Watch this.”

Harry held up the fingernail clipping and concentrated. He could feel his wand in his pocket resonating with his unseen commands as he directed his magic and focussed it on what he wanted it to do. Narrowing his eyes, Harry few his arm back and flicked. The nail shot at Amanda in a wide arc, too fast for the girl to react. There was the high-pitched ripping noise and Amanda barely had the chance to blink before her tight, white shirt came apart at the shoulders. The

cloth fell down and Harry leaned forward eagerly, but was blocked by Amanda's hair as she whirled around.

"Reparo!" She snapped, mending her shirt with a wave of her wand. "Harry, I'm so gonna kill you for that."

"You started it," Harry said with a chuckle. He leaned back in his chair and grinned. "And the moral of the story today is: Don't tell Harry he can't do something when he knows he perfectly-well can. You just make yourself look like an idiot."

"You didn't...see anything, right?"

Harry didn't say anything and although he knew he hadn't, he allowed a rather twisted and lecherous grin cross his face. Amanda took one look at his expression and blushed furiously, her wand literally quivering in her hand.

"You...you..." she spluttered.

"Relax," Harry said in a bored tone. "After all, I am."

The blonde muttered something under her breath and grudgingly dropped the subject. She stood there for a few minutes gazing at Harry expectantly before she let out an impatient sigh and tapped her foot.

"Well?" she demanded. "You got a nice look out of this. The least you could do is teach me a new spell instead of lazing about on the chair that I had to drag down from the common room."

"Hey, I'm sore and tired," Harry said defensively, wriggling back into the cushions. "I do have a life outside of you, you know. I was very busy this morning."

"Doing what?"

"Ah," Harry said and grinned. He tapped his nose and winked. "That, brat, would be a secret. You can read about it in the paper tomorrow though."

"Oh," Amanda uttered and winced. "The paper? That's never a good thing to hear from you."

"Anyway," Harry continued as if she hadn't spoken. "Your problem isn't your lack of spells. Actually, you have a fairly decent arsenal for somebody of your...level."

Amanda rolled her eyes.

"Your problem is that you're too slow," Harry explained, throwing her a pointed look. "You can know all the spells in the world if you want, but somebody like me can do ten spells when you've done one."

"Okay," Amanda said, nodding every once in a while during Harry's explanation. "How do I get as fast as you?"

"Well, that's simple. All you really need is some loose change," Harry answered. He grinned at her darkly. "Got any silvers?"

It only took a moment for Amanda to clue on. When she did, she was already shaking her head firmly.

"Not going there, Harry," she warned.

"Please," Harry scoffed. "I wouldn't want you to. Could you imagine letting somebody like you join the ranks? Hell, you'd probably survive past the first year purely to spite you. Putting up with you for eternity...now that would be annoying."

"Hey, I'd make a good..." Amanda defended automatically, before she paused. "Well, er..."

"Well, you can't cheat like I did," Harry said musingly and tapped his head at Amanda's inquisitive look. "Most of my reflexes and reaction speeds are better than most because of her. We've been working on that actually, and she can actually and temporarily speed up my brain. Not too much, mind you, but enough to get me fighting at Dumbledore or Voldemort's speed."

“But how do I get faster?”

“Practise your wand movements,” Harry answered with a shrug. “You got a lot of wasted movement on there. Practise your hand-eye co-ordination skills. You need to know every detail of your wand when you’re holding it, from the exact angle it’s at to the how much pressure you’re holding it with. That can really make a difference. Practise the spells, again and again and again, until they become second-nature and you do them by instinct.”

Amanda looked more and more determined as he went on.

“Frankly, you’ve got years and years of work ahead of you,” Harry conceded. “I don’t know if there are any shortcuts for you. You could try looking at some potions, maybe? I know shit all about them but there might be some that you could take before a fight.”

“I should research that,” Amanda muttered to herself. “Maybe I can check the library...”

“The library?” Harry repeated blankly. “Sure, I suppose you might find body-enhancing potions to make you more dangerous in life-and-death combat in a school library. That makes perfect sense.”

“Shut up,” Amanda grumbled, although she blushed at Harry’s tone. Still, she looked determined as she stood her ground. “At least I’m trying to get ready before it all happens, you know. I get the feeling that something big is gonna happen soon- and I don’t want to hear a single penis joke out of you!”

“Penis joke?” Harry asked after an awkward pause.

“Something big...happen soon?” Amanda trailed off at Harry’s confused expression.

“Didn’t even occur to me,” Harry admitted,

“Oh,” Amanda said quietly.

"Amanda, you're such a filthy girl," Harry teased with sniggered at Amanda's mortified expression. "Seriously, you've been hanging around me for too long. Hell, I remember when you were a nice and innocent little Catholic schoolgirl who used to blush at everything I said. Then again, I also remember you when you had no breasts, so..."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"Nothing," Harry replied honestly and grinned. "I just like talking about your chest. It takes my mind off other things."

"Like what?" Amanda asked, and then slapped herself on the forehead a moment later. "Shouldn't have asked..." she muttered.

"Like your legs." Harry grinned as Amanda urged him on impatiently, rolling her eyes and shaking her head. The Denarian grew serious though and leaned back in the chair, suddenly appearing pensive. "So," he said after a few moments. "What type of feelings are these?"

"Huh?" Amanda asked, before she recalled what she had just said. "Oh, those ones? I dunno, I can just...feel it."

"How does it feel?"

"It just feels..." Amanda trailed off, clearly fumbling for words. Harry waited patiently as she tried to explain the concept in a way that he could understand. "It's like...a niggling feeling...that comes from all of your body- but it doesn't?" She laughed nervously. "I know that doesn't make sense..."

"Oh, it does," Harry said, and there was a strange hitch in his voice.

When Amanda looked up, however, his face was impassive and showed nothing of what he was thinking. Shrugging it aside, she kicked at the ground and absently flicked her ponytail over her shoulder.

"Yeah, well," she began, suddenly feeling uncomfortable. "As long as I'm ready before the final battle, I'll be happy."

"The final battle?" Harry repeated. "What's that?"

"You know, the final battle between you and Voldemort," Amanda explained impatiently.

"We're having a final battle?" Harry asked and looked genuinely surprised. "Who said we're having a final battle? Has Voldemort said something that I don't know?"

"Well, no," Amanda dragged out. She looked adorably confused. "But...you know, it's how it goes. The good guy and the bad guy have a massive battle to decide the fate of the world...etcetera."

Harry, however, was staring at her like she had just grown a tail- and not one of the good kinds that he may or may not have found to be incredibly kinky.

"The fate of the world?" He repeated her again and stared at her blankly. His lips twitched, the edges of his eyes crinkled and he threw back and let out a throaty laugh.

"What?" Amanda asked as Harry laughed. She frowned and looked annoyed. "What is it?"

"You stupid girl," Harry said, almost fondly. He leaned forward, his gaze amused. "Do you really think what Voldemort and I have going involves the fate of the world?"

"Well..." Amanda trailed off.

"Do you know how many different 'worlds' there are out there? Do you know how many organisations and groups exist by this one?" Harry demanded wryly. "Hmm, let's see. There are the wand-wizards, the True Wizards, the muggle's, the Vampire Courts, the Necromancers of the Necromatium, the Order of the Blackened Denarius, the Knights of the Cross, the Winter Court, the Summer Court, the werewolf dens of Albania, the dragons, the drakons, the yeti's of Antarctica...fuck, I could go on, Amanda."

He reached out and poked her on the forehead, making her start in surprise.

“Seriously though, how many of these ‘worlds’ do you think this is going to affect? Hell, do you know how many of them actually care?” Harry asked, genuinely wanting to know the answer.

“Well, I...I don’t know,” Amanda confessed.

“Because I’m in the equation, four,” Harry answered and ticked them off with his fingers. “It’ll be the wand-wizards, muggles, the Denarians and the Knights.” He paused. “Well, we could make it five if I ever figure out what that phoenix is doing out of the Summer Court. Well, six, because I did sorta drag Maeve into it. Seven, for that Drakon I killed and eight, for those vampires...”

He trailed off, scratching his head.

“The point is,” he blustered on. “This isn’t the final battle between light and darkness, brat,” Harry explained. “The ‘worlds’ aren’t going to be choosing sides and there’s not going to be some massively epic battle that will decide the fate of the world. This is all about one guy and how he’s trying to basically overthrow the government of one country. I will admit that Voldemort isn’t just a nobody, but in the end—in the grand scheme of ‘things’,” and here he added quotations marks with his fingers. “This little tiff that’s happening just isn’t that big.”

“Then why are you here?” Amanda demanded. She pointed at him. “Why did you get the coin? Why did you become a Denarian? Why did you become a Knight? Why did you get all involved in this?”

“It’s a mixture of fate and free-will,” Harry responded seriously. “On one hand, I think I’d have always been destined to butt heads with Voldemort for reasons you just don’t need to know. On the other hand, I choose to walk this path because...”

Harry was silent and Amanda waited impatiently for him to finish. Finally, she couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Why?” she blurted out. “Why are you still here?”

“Because...” Harry trailed off, looking up at the ceiling thoughtfully. He seemed to come to a conclusion and gave a short nod of satisfaction. “Because...it’s fun.”

Amanda stared at Harry and the silly little smile playing at his lips and a strange look came across her face, as if this was a part of him that she had never really seen before. Something flicked in her eyes and her face became soft, warm and inviting.

“Oh, Harry,” she said warmly. “You know, I really think you are the freest one of us all. You can just...well, you can walk your own path just because it’s fun.”

“Hey,” Harry snapped and sniffed disdainfully. “Don’t go making it sound so...gay.”

Amanda was still smiling when he literally jumped out of his seat and pulled out his wand.

“Alright, brat,” he declared. “Let’s have a duel. If you can last one minute against me, I just might teach you a little spell that you might find useful.”

“Thanks, Harry,” Amanda said gratefully, although a part of her winced at the thought of her upcoming arse-kicking. “I really don’t know how I can thank you.”

“Ah, I can think of a few ways,” Harry said with a snicker.

Amanda tilted her head, still smiling.

“Be careful, Harry,” she warned teasingly. She leaned in, her serious eyes contrasting with her happy face. “One day, I just might say yes and then you’ll be stuck with me.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up to his forehead at that little comment. Amanda took that split-second when he looked confused to flick her wand and jab it at Harry. A blast of crimson light soared at him and Harry had to hastily sidestep.

“Oi! You just attacked me when I wasn’t ready!”

Amanda nodded smugly and the Denarian allowed a vicious smile to come over his face.

“Good job,” he praised. Then, for no apparent reason, Amanda let out a cry of shock as something slammed into her from the side and sent her tumbling to the ground. “But, really, that’s how you do it properly.”

Amanda’s response to that was a flick of her wand and a sharp cry of “Effodio!”. With a slightly bloodthirsty grin, Harry batted the curse aside and the two began to duel.

At the same time, in a location very far away, Lord Voldemort gazed down at the shivering form of his prostrating servant. A ring of hooded and masked Death Eaters surrounded the Dark Lord, each gazing down at the creature with blank white masks. Some of them Death Eater’s didn’t even bother hiding their disgust at the wretched creature before them.

Voldemort paced around the figure slowly, idly twirling his wand between his fingers. He would start on his index finger and end at his pinkie and then repeat it again in less than a second. He opened his mouth and hissed out one word.

“Explain.”

“They...they came...the krutuckrack!” the goblin gasped out, his small form literally shaking with fear. “They came and attacked!”

“Those Who Dwell Within The Abyss?” Voldemort translated. His mouth moved in what might have construed as a smile- if he had lips. “How very dramatic. These Denarians certainly do have a reputation.”

“They sought something that belonged to them,” the goblin continued, refusing to meet the eyes of his master. “They demanded we take them to it. But...it was the Black Vault! Your vault! I had to stop them! I had to attack them!”

Voldemort paused in his pacing and swung around. There was something else on his face other than idle amusement now, a dangerous look consisting of rising apprehension and cold fury.

"They sought the Black Vault?" he asked quietly.

"They attacked the Black vault, master," the goblin cried and threw himself at Voldemort's legs. He reached out with trembling hands clutching at Voldemort's robes. "I failed you, milord!"

Voldemort lashed out with his leg, kicking away the snivelling creature with ease. He seemed to be in very deep thought. The goblin picked itself up and waited anxiously for Lord Voldemort to speak.

"Your hostile actions against the Blackened Order of Denarius, while unwise and against my previous orders were justified," Voldemort finally conceded.

The goblin lowered his head and wept as Voldemort had just pardoned him from the death sentence. In a way, the Dark Lord probably had.

"Tell me, and this is most important," Voldemort continued, his eyes gleaming. "Was there anything missing from the Vault? Did the Denarians take something?"

"N-No, milord," the goblin stuttered. "They... everything was accounted for. However, the Gemino and Flagrante curses on one object were activated. I checked and the original is still in your possession.

"Was it a cup?" Voldemort asked, and there was a sense of urgency in his voice.

"N-no," the goblin answered, looking confused. "They attempted to steal the Crown of Luffekarg. The Black Family inherited it after the rebellion of 1658- their Head brutally slew the Warlord of the Golden Band."

"I see," Voldemort uttered. He remained motionless. "I assume that you could not identify them."

"No, master," the goblin answered. It seemed to be faring a little better now that it wasn't under any immediate threat of death. "There were two cloaked figures. One revealed itself to be a woman. The other was male but kept his hood on."

"Very well," Voldemort said after a few more moments of deliberation. "You have served me well, goblin. Continue to follow me and I assure you, you will become the richest and most powerful goblin in the entirety of the world. Once my victory has come, Hogwarts will be solely yours for the plunder. You are dismissed."

"Thank you, milord," the little goblin said. It touched something in its pocket and abruptly disappeared.

Lord Voldemort stood still for a few moments after the goblin left. Then, a thin smile appeared on his face as he glanced to the side.

"It's a miserable little creature, is it not?" he asked.

Several of the Death Eater's chuckled beneath their masks as Voldemort raised his hand. He flicked his wrist and the thick, black curtains along the walls opened, revealing large glass-panelled windows and a rather pleasant country view. Sunlight poured into the room, casting off the apparent gloom of a few moments ago.

"That is much better," Voldemort murmured. "I will never understand the goblin's need for melodrama."

The Dark Lord paused before one of the windows, tilting his head back as if he were appreciating the sunlight on his face. The action, which would have bewildered the goblin, garnered no reaction from his loyal Death Eaters, who were content to stand and wait for their Master.

"What is it, Rabastan?" Voldemort suddenly asked. He tilted his head in a rather snake-like motion as his eyes came to rest on one of the

masked Death Eaters. "It seems that you have something on your mind, my loyal servant."

"I...I am curious, milord," Rabastan said behind his mask, his head bowed in subservience. "Could one of these 'Denarians' the goblin spoke of be...him?"

"Him?" Voldemort asked, already knowing the answer. "Who do you speak of?"

"Potter," Rabastan dragged out.

The other Death Eaters shifted on their feet nervously. Voldemort found that their reactions to be quite ironic. They reacted to the very mention of Harry Potter's name like the rest of the world reacted to his name. Of course, Voldemort conceded, they alone knew the true nature of Potter and just what he carried within him. Wizards were not a religious lot by nature but even his Death Eaters acknowledged that Harry Potter was something to be feared.

He was a demon, after all.

"Perhaps," he said quietly after a few moments. "I am not aware of any alliances with the Blackened Order, but Potter may have gained a follower. Severus did report that Potter and Dumbledore met as planned today; however, that could have merely been a ruse."

Voldemort paused, deep in thought.

"No...no, I had best be sure," he murmured. "Rodolphous."

"Yes, milord?" one of the other cloaked Death Eaters intoned.

"Where is your wife?" Voldemort asked.

"I believe she is out on the Bones assignment, milord," Rodolphous answered smoothly.

"I see," Voldemort answered. He was still for a minute. "Your arm, Rabastan. I need to speak to her immediately."

“Yes, Master.”

“What is it that you wish her to do?” Rodolphous dared to ask as Rabastan rolled up his sleeve.

“It would be wise of you to concentrate on your own assignments, Rodolphous,” Voldemort replied. His eyes gleamed and his nostrils flared and Rabastan stifled a scream as his master’s thumb came down on his jet-black mark. “You have your errands and Bellatrix has hers.”

“Forgive me, Master,” Rodolphous bowed.

“You are forgiven, Rodolphous,” Voldemort conceded graciously. “Now, I believe it’s time for Nagini to be fed. Go and give her one of the muggles in the basement- oh, and Rodolphous?”

“Yes, Master?”

“Pick a small one, will you? Nagini has gotten rather...large lately. It can’t be good for her health.”

“Yes, Master.”

A/N: Hey everybody. Here's a little present for the Easter break. Thanks to the DLP guys and Jon for correcting and plotting and generally getting me off my arse to do something. You can also thank Jon for a large delay in this chapter for buying me Team Fortress 2. That game is freaking addictive. So's Bioshock, which I've been replaying. Anyway, here's the first chapter in a two parter. Most of it is setting it up for the next chapter but there's a large introspective look on the Blackened Order, both past and present. I hope you enjoy it.

It was the week after Harry's little trip to Gringotts and the third week of December. Harry really didn't like this time of the year with Christmas looming up, only a few days away. It was too cold, he had declared. Plus, everybody was acting so happy and cheerful and not at all like their normal miserable selves. Harry actually didn't like going down the street and being in a suit what he wanted for Christmas every time he stepped into a shopping centre, which these days was something he found himself doing quite a lot. It seemed like after the Gringotts raids, all of his enemies had gone on holiday.

Dumbledore had relayed to him that Voldemort was investigating the theft from the Black Vault, but because of the heightened security and compulsory Ministry guards, the only Death Eater with permission to access the vault couldn't come within a hundred metres of the bank without getting caught out. On the positive side, Dumbledore said, the Ministry of Magic had tightened security on all major public events and locations for the Christmas break, making even Voldemort a little hesitant in making any major moves.

Verrine was out, looking for information about the Blackened Order and their hiding places. They had scurried away since their last close encounter and Harry had the feeling that they were waiting for something to happen. Maybe they were planning an all-out attack on him? He was sure that Verrine wasn't a double agent but he still didn't know if he could trust her- and by trust, he meant rely on her information. It was only a matter of time before the other Denarian tried to betray him, Harry figured, if only because that was what he would have done if he were in Verrine's position- get the stronger party to knock out all of the competition and take control for himself.

It was enjoyable being a cynical arsehole.

With Christmas around the corner and the ground continually covered in snow and ice, Harry only rarely left his apartment when he was completely and utterly bored. There was always something to do, whether it was practising his Word techniques (without actually producing the Word itself- Harry had gotten used to his little hovel and didn't want to see it ripped apart by arcane magic) or just lying about conversing with Meciél. The Fallen was slowly coming out of the metaphorical shell she had put herself in but it was hard to tell what she was thinking.

Then, of course, there was the Sword of the Cross. Harry was really beginning to despise that thing- even more than usual. It lay across his bookshelf, looking innocuous and harmless, but it seemed that it was calling him out to do 'His' work every day now. Harry had come to the point with his skills in magic that he was relying less and less on the sword for its abilities. Even when he wanted to use it though, the silver blade always seemed to escape his mind and he'd only remember it when he walked through the front door and saw it lying there. Harry got the sense that it too was waiting for something but he didn't care.

A lot of his recent battles might have been a tad easier if he 'remembered' to bring the sword along with him. It was coming to the point where if he couldn't use it for what he wanted it for, then why should he cooperate with it in the first place? He didn't mind the fighting, but the entire situation was grating on his nerves. After the last errand, he was sorely tempted to kill the man he had just saved, who had turned out to be somebody with the most incredibly annoying and whiny voice. Amanda, Dumbledore and the other students at Hogwarts he had forgotten about- they were nothing on the sheer petulance that this man managed to produce.

The sword must have gotten his feelings because it had urged him home and then lay dormant for two days. Harry didn't mind much. He enjoyed his time off. It gave him a chance to stuff around with Meciél. Better yet, one of his neighbours had gone away to visit his family for Christmas and Harry, with a bit of wand-type persuasion, had

managed to convince him to let Harry look after his apartment while he was gone. This meant that Harry could catch up on something he rarely ever got to do: watch TV.

“Oh, for the love of...” Harry growled, leaning forward on his neighbour’s couch and glaring at the flickering television in front of him. “Kill the little brat! Strangle her with her weird-arse pigtails! No, no, don’t...don’t sing again!”

“Do you think you might be taking this a little bit too seriously?” Meciél asked lightly. She was seated next to Harry, watching the TV with the gaze of one only partly paying attention. “It’s only an animated program.”

“How the Grinch stole Christmas,” Harry quoted with a scowl. “It implies that the ugly bastard will take everything and keep it. Not... give it back and....gah! Now I’m all disappointed.”

He thumped his hand down on the arm of the chair, looking and feeling disgruntled.

“I feel strangely let down,” Harry muttered. “That’s blatant false advertisement.”

“Your hatred of this seasonal holiday is quite fascinating,” Meciél mused thoughtfully. “It’s hard to tell whether it’s because of my influence or because of your rather miserable childhood.”

“Oi, we’re not going there,” Harry muttered and frowned. “Besides, you’re one to talk about my past.”

The unspoken incident at Azkaban was still fresh on both their minds. Harry regretted the words as soon as they had come out of his mouth and winced as Meciél’s face suddenly lost all emotion. She stared back at him with her luminous silver eyes, a gaze that the most strong-willed man would have found unnerving, but Harry met her eyes stubbornly.

“I think that you should be able to trust me by now,” Harry said quietly, tuning out the background buzz of the television. There was no fire in

his voice, just a statement of fact. "We're in this together, Meciél. My problems are your problems and vice versa. You'll help me take care of Voldemort and I'll help you take care of the Denarians. You shouldn't need to hide from me."

There was an awkward silence that permeated through the apartment. Meciél regarded Harry with an emotion that he couldn't quite identify. To his credit, he met her gaze squarely and honestly. He had his suspicions about what may or may not have transpired in her past but frankly, he wasn't going to guess. Meciél was either going to tell him or she was going to wait a while- and then tell him. He couldn't see it happening any other way.

Fortunately for mysterious raven-haired Fallen, and unfortunately for her host, there was a knock on the door and Harry started in surprise. Meciél's illusion disappeared from his side and he scowled.

"Yeah, yeah," he muttered as he stood up. "I'm coming!" he snapped out loudly as the visitor knocked again. "Making me get up...walk to the door...fucking bastard...it's almost Christmas...snowy as shit out there..."

Harry flung the door open and glowered at whatever unsuspecting person had decided to visit him or, rather, his neighbours.

"What the hell do you...?" Harry began heatedly. He paused as he recognised the visitor and scowled. "Oh, it's you."

"It is," Verrine agreed, absently flipping her bangs from her face.

"How'd you find me?" Harry asked, slightly curious as he leaned on the doorway.

"I followed the sound of your screaming," Verrine answered and looked faintly amused. "You're not a very quiet person, are you?"

"Well, you're not a very..." Harry paused, stumbling for a word. "A very...cool person," he finished lamely. At Verrine's puzzled face, he scowled. "Fuck you. Even I can't be awesomely witty all the time."

"Of course you can't," Verrine responded after a moment's pause. She sounded patronising as she leaned forward and patted Harry on the shoulder. "We don't expect you to."

"Anyone ever tell you that you're a bitch?" Harry muttered.

Verrine frowned and shook her head slowly. "I don't think they have," she said smoothly, her brows scrunching up in thought. "I think I'd make sure that I would remember."

"Ooh, scary," Harry deadpanned. "What do you want, bitch?"

Verrine said nothing and looked pointedly at Harry, who waited a few moments and then sighed. He stood back from the doorway and allowed Verrine to enter. The female Denarian strolled into the noticeably bright and clean apartment and her jaw opened in amazement.

"Are you telling me that your apartment could look like this if you just put in the effort?"

"Hey, dark, dusty and damp are the rage this year," Harry grumbled, throwing himself back on the couch and propping up his feet on the coffee table. "The property value on my place is only going to go up."

"Yes, because magical ward-schemes and demonic summoning circles powered by the very fires of hell are just what an enterprising new couple is looking for these days," Verrine retorted.

"Why can't you..." Harry started. He paused, closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. "Verrine, I'm about to show you the true meaning of the word Crucio if you don't- are you wearing silk panties?"

Verrine had seated herself on the other couch and also put her legs up, allowing Harry a very nice view of what lay beneath her skirt. It seemed as if Verrine was dressed up a little fancier than normal. She was wearing a slimming red dress, which literally glittered underneath the harsh light of the cheap light bulbs. Her hair had been done up,

she was wearing makeup and was sporting a genuine leather handbag.

“What’s the occasion?” Harry asked blankly.

Verrine’s lips curved and she chuckled in good humour. Her smile faded as Harry merely looked puzzled at her laughter.

“Are you joking?” she asked incredulously. Harry shook his head. “It’s Christmas!”

“Oh, c’mon, that’s still a week off,” Harry snapped and then frowned. “Wait.” He uttered, turning to her with a look of amazement. “You celebrate Christmas?”

“Yes,” Verrine answered. “Don’t you?”

“Um...no,” Harry answered, feeling stupefied. “You do know that that guy...Jesus, I think his name was born on the 25th of December, right? Jesus, as in, the Son of God Jesus. Jesus, as in the son of the Denarian’s mortal enemy?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say God is our mortal enemy,” Verrine pondered. “Besides, Jesus was actually born sometime in June. I only remember that because I recall going to this outrageous party- oh, how the Romans could make wine.”

“Why do people celebrate Jesus’ birth on Christmas then?” Harry questioned a tad curiously.

“Something about linking Christianity with a pagan holiday,” Verrine answered carelessly. “The Church attempted and succeeded in forcing their influence on the pagan nations through methods such as this. It’s really quite interesting.”

Harry stared at her with the most befuddled expression. He was struggling for words, as if he couldn’t just believe what he had heard. Verrine noticed his expression and rolled her eyes.

"I briefly studied at University in the 1970's," she explained. "You will be surprised at what I picked up about 'the man'."

"You're an idiot," Harry declared bluntly. He turned back to the animated TV program, watching the Grinch do something with a stupid little red hat on his head. "You're even dumber than this show."

"Do you like it?" Verrine asked curiously.

"Well, no, not really," Harry answered. "The title is totally misleading to the actual plot of the story. Isn't that fraud or something?"

"No, not the show," Verrine clarified. "My dress." She stood and gave a little twirl, her hair glimmering as it twirled around her head. She was really beautiful, Harry thought, even as his breath caught.

Only a little, though.

"Yeah, I do," Harry admitted. Verrine beamed and gazed at him fondly, as if those words were enough to endear him to her. "Actually, it makes you look like expensive prostitutes, which are my favourite types of prostitutes. They're less likely to have diseases, you see. Tell me, Verrine," Harry leaned forward, his eyes on the other Denarian. "Do you have a disease that I should know about?"

Verrine tilted her head, looking strangely amused at Harry's negative commentary. She tossed her hair over her shoulder- Harry noticed that she did that a lot- and smiled down at him, not looking displeased at all.

"Is it that hard to be nice to a beautiful woman, Harry?" she pouted.

"Well, if one enters the room then I suppose you'll see," Harry quipped back.

Verrine ignored him, rubbing her chin in a display of mock thoughtfulness. She slowly moved from her end to the couch and walked behind Harry's couch. Harry lost track of her and his eyes went blank as he focussed on all of his senses into tracking her movements. He could smell her perfume, a rather sweet scent that

reminded him of the strawberries that Cessbubly loved to dig into. He could also feel the slight vibrations and hear her footsteps as she approached him from behind.

Was this it? Was this Verrine's inevitable betrayal? Without so much as a twitch, Harry readied himself. Dozens of strategies rushed at him as his hand casually moved on the couch as he adjusted himself, bringing it closer to the wand. At the same time, he prepared to flare out his wings, ready to slice this traitorous bitch apart. The TV was a dull buzz in the background and he could literally hear Verrine's heart as she approached him. Clothes rustled- she was reaching for something!

Harry tensed, Hellfire roared through him, power surged into his wand, the TV and lights flickered- and Verrine dropped something red onto his lap. His wings lashed out but Harry instinctively stared down at...Verrine's dress?

"My, my," Verrine giggled, ignoring the bony points that pressed into her. Harry kept staring at the slinky red dress in his lap, looking at it blankly as Verrine moved forward, Her arms entangled around his neck and for a second, Harry wondered if she thought breaking his neck would kill him. Then, as her hair dropped down over his face and his nose breathed in her scent, she spoke.

"Is this how you treat all half-naked women who drape themselves over you?" Verrine chuckled into his ear. "I have a theory about you, Harry. Would you like to hear it?"

"I have a theory about you too, Verrine," Harry responded, his voice just a tad strangled. The wings dug deeper into her pale skin but the other Denarian ignored it. "It's about how many litres of blood your body has and how quickly I can drain it from your body."

"You see, Harry," Verrine continued as if he hadn't said anything. "Despite all your boasts and claims, I think you're a virgin- or close to."

Harry was about to retort with something starting with 'Maeve' and ending with 'preggers' when he decided that Verrine didn't really need

to know about his association with the Winter Court, and especially didn't need to know about Amaris. He eyed her suspiciously.

"It's all so simple. Your outlandish boasts, your childish ways of flirting with me..."

"Flirting with you?" Harry repeated quietly.

"Please," Verrine murmured from behind him and Harry could somehow feel her amusement. "Everybody knows that the boys tease and bully the girls that they like. They simply don't know how to express themselves any other way. Although, most of them grow out of it by the age of twelve..."

Harry was silent.

"And now, I'll prove my theory," Verrine breathed into his ear, her warm breath cascading down his skin. She slunk over the chair, batting away the bony blades that protruded from Harry's back, and somehow managed to end up wriggling in his lap wearing nothing more than a set of sheer silky lingerie.

"Now," Verrine said quietly, running a hand down Harry's chest. "You have a problem. There is a half-naked and very beautiful woman squirming in your lap. She, admittedly, has deep-seated issues about her appearance and is anxious to prove herself to you. Your dilemma is this: What will you do?"

As Meciél's illusion appeared over Verrine's shoulder, her eyes narrowed, Harry, for once, didn't even have the slightest retort.

Seduction attempts aside, Verrine had come to see him for another reason. Apparently, for the first time since Harry had employed her, she had finally produced some viable information. The Order of the Blackened Denarius was meeting in a couple of days- all of them.

This was the chance that Meciél had been waiting for.

Standing in his heavily-warded apartment, Harry stared down at the blueprints and schematics for the manor where the meeting was to

take place. He cocked his head, reviewing Verrine's curvy notes at the side, and frowned in thought.

"This is a problem."

Verrine, who seemed to be taking a great deal of pleasure in stretching herself out on Harry's couch and looking extremely smug, looked up. She brushed her damp hair out of her eyes and stood up, slinking to Harry's side.

"The security system?" she questioned and chuckled. "I hardly think you'll be troubled with a few men and some guns."

"A few men, no," Harry answered. "A couple of hundred men with assault weapons, guard dogs, land mines...and is that meant to be a fucking tank?"

"Two tanks," Verrine replied casually. "And a humvee."

"How the hell did the Blackened Order get their hands on a couple of tanks?"

"We are extremely well connected," Verrine replied smoothly. She patted Harry on the back, smiling as the Denarian twitched at her forwardness. "That shouldn't be a problem for you."

"The problem is that to get through all of that stuff will take some time," Harry snapped irritably and shrugged off Verrine's hand. "I don't want them running off."

"They will," Verrine informed him. At his inquisitive look, she elaborated. "There's a standing order to flee on sight if you ever appear. They will run once your presence is known."

Harry grimaced.

"Our best chance would be for you to surprise them, preferably killing as many as you can at the same time," Verrine finished. She lifted her arms and shrugged. "I don't know how you will accomplish that though."

"You're going to the meeting as well, aren't you?" Harry asked the other Denarian.

Verrine nodded.

"The Blackened Order doesn't know about my...association...with you," she answered smoothly. She smoothed down her skirts and managed a tiny smile. "If they do, then I think that my participation in this meeting will be very short- unless they decide to be cruel."

"Could you sneak in a bomb or something?" Harry questioned curiously. He scratched his head. "Or...I dunno...poison them?"

"Out of the question," Verrine declared flatly and with such finality that Harry gave up that train of thought. The brunette woman watched Harry scowl and mutter something under his breath. "Couldn't you do that...thing...that you can do with your wand? Turn yourself into an animal or something and sneak in?"

"If you've ever seen some of the more violent reactions to my transfiguration skills then you'll know why I'm not even going to try that," Harry said flatly.

"What about a spell?" Verrine proposed again. "Do you have a charm or a ward that can stop a portal to the Nevernever from opening?"

"There are some spells that could help, but I..." Harry hesitated and scowled. "The house is too big for some quick wand-work. I wouldn't be able to do it in time," he admitted grudgingly.

Verrine looked disappointed.

"Then I suppose that we might have to overlook this opportunity," she said. She glanced at Harry and frowned when she saw that he was studying the roof of his apartment carefully. "What is it?"

"I just might have an idea," Harry mused thoughtfully.

Verrine was not a happy Denarian. She would be the first to admit (only overtaken by an enthusiastically antagonistic Harry who liked pushing her buttons- in more ways than one) that she was not a fighter. It wasn't to say that she wasn't good at fighting, she was one of the more powerful Denarians- no match for the old Denarian Lords or even Tessa, but she had tangled with Deirdre and a few others in her time and had always come out on top.

Well, mostly. There had been this one time in Italy where Deirdre had seen fit to throw a mountain at her. The snowy peak had smashed her host body flat and it had been a few years before Verrine was able to manipulate the situation so that one of Hannibal's passing troops picked up her silver coin.

Verrine's major problem with the present situation was that it put her in danger. She hated taking risks, for every death led her back to the Void where she could feel her sanity chip away just that little bit more. She wasn't in any immediate danger of going insane like some of her more violent kin, but when she looked at the big picture, i.e. eternity, every little bit of her consciousness lost to the Void was a devastating blow. Perhaps she would get lucky and the apocalypse would come soon.

Still, Verrine knew her place.

"We have arrived, Madam."

Verrine glanced up from the backseat of the stretch-limo and nodded at the chauffeur. The car rolled to a halt and Verrine waited as two men approached the car. They opened her door for her and Verrine's lips tilted. She did love being pampered. Smoothing down her long, red dress, Verrine got out of the car and appraised her surroundings.

The Order of the Blackened Denarius had been around for millennia. During that time, they had legally acquired vast acres of properties and land. This manor, if Verrine recalled correctly, was given to the late Nicodemus for his 'valour' during the Hundred Year War. The King of England had been most impressed, especially after he was done screwing around with the Denarian Lord's daughter.

This manor was out of the way, nestled in a stretch of woodlands that had been put on the National Preservation list for the sole factor of keeping others away. Three stories tall, a hundred metres long and built with a multitude of white bricks, magnificent arches and the occasional gargoyle, the property had to be worth millions today. It was also heavily defended. Dozens of guards patrolled the perimeter, led by well-trained attack dogs. Verrine didn't need to see the crimson eyes of the dogs to know that they were the Orders' own special breed of canine. But, the most eye-catching thing of the manor would have to be the fifty-ton armoured tank that sat in the middle of the green courtyard. Verrine was slightly bemused by that. All it would take was a wizard to sufficiently screw up the electronics and the tank would be reduced to nothing better than a multi-million dollar paperweight.

Still, it did look cool.

"My word," Verrine mused to herself. "I'm beginning to speak like him."

"I'm sorry, Madam?"

"Never you mind," Verrine commanded imperiously and the chauffer stiffened.

The two guards at her door remained motionless as she ducked her head and stepped out of the car and into the manor courtyard. The wind ruffled her hair and Verrine paused, her eyes flickering up to the night sky. It was beautiful- the stars always were. Verrine found that beauty to be quite ironic, especially since she was, in a way, present when many of them had been created.

As one of the guards motioned her forward, Verrine shook her childhood memories out of her thoughts and followed the two heavily-armed men towards the mansion. Her shiny and fashionable handbag gently slapped across her waist and her high-heels clicked and clacked with every step she took as the guards led her up a flight of stairs and to the entrance of the manor. Six guards stood there, staring at her balefully. They blocked her path as she approached.

“Why do you impede me?” Verrine asked as haughtily as one expected from a Denarian Princess.

Well, the proper title was Duchess, but Verrine liked the connotations that went with Princess better. Deirdre wasn't the only one to attach herself to Royalty in earlier times.

The lead guard, a gigantic pale man that dwarfed over Verrine, said nothing but motioned to her handbag. Verrine frowned as the guard became more insistent.

“You wish to search my bag?” she asked in amusement. “Well, this is new. When was the slave given the right to question the master?”

The guard flinched as if Verrine had struck him. His scarred face crinkled up as he narrowed his beady eyes. One of the others put a hand on his shoulder but he shrugged it off.

“Why don't...Oh, I see,” Verrine said and chuckled. “You're one of Nicodemus' leftovers. I never did understand why he cut out your tongues...”

The guard didn't utter a sound but reached out with his meaty paw for Verrine's handbag. The smile slipped off Verrine's face, her hand shot out and closed around the man's thick arm and the guard made his first audible grunt as Verrine twisted his arm around and brought him to his knees with his back facing towards her.

“Mortal,” Verrine hissed coldly and her eyes were dark and fathomless. “Remember your place.”

It would have looked funny to those unaware of Verrine's particular strengths to see a slight woman physically restraining a man that would look in place in a wrestling ring. Verrine's foot lashed out and huge guard tumbled to the ground as his knee let out an audible crack underneath the force of the high-heel. Verrine ignored the guard and turned to the five other men, who were standing there stiffly and looking at anything except their injured comrade.

“Now, as you were kind enough to not paw at me...” Verrine murmured and opened her handbag.

One of the guards was brave enough to step forward and have a look inside. Apart from some makeup, a pair of glasses, a purse and a deck of cards, the bag was empty. The guard stood back and gave Verrine an apologetic nod as he stepped aside.

The inside of the manor was as glorious and beautiful as the outside. There were no electric lights and the entire hall was lit up by hundreds of flickering candles, the wards of the manor allowing for nothing else. Because of the powerful wards, Verrine knew she could wander around without fear of security cameras and the like. All she had to do was avoid the patrols and she could complete her objective.

Her footsteps echoed loudly off the white marble floor as she strode through the large and deserted entrance hall. None of the inner turmoil she was feeling showed on her face as she turned a corner and began striding for her destination. A few moments later, Verrine slipped into a large and mostly empty room- one that she had chosen hours ago at the meeting with Harry. It was unused and a fair distance away from any prying eyes. A few pieces of furniture covered by white drapes of cloth littered the room and the dust that lay on the floors showed that the room had been left undisturbed for quite some time.

“Well, Harry,” Verrine muttered as she reached into her handbag. “Here I am.”

For a brief moment, Verrine wondered if it was worth it. Perhaps she should just get out now, abandon the Blackened Order and Miciel's Host and just flee the country. They both were determined enough that they might destroy each other. The Blackened Order would probably contribute her disappearance to Harry and Harry wouldn't really care if she stayed or left when it came down to it. In the end, it all came down to power.

She was determined to have it.

From her hand bag, she pulled out the deck of cards and opened the box. She tipped it upside down and deftly caught the contents, a rough piece of wood with a piece of paper stuck around it. Verrine studied it carefully, noting the carefully inscribed runes and symbols on the piece of paper.

"I press...this?" Verrine wondered out loud.

Her thumb hovered over the piece of paper and she pressed down with it. Almost instantly, a surge of energy quite unlike anything she had ever channelled before zipped through her body and the small block of wood began to rapidly expand on the surface of the ground. Verrine didn't stay and watch and ducked out of the room, the hardest part of her mission done.

The rest was up to Harry.

Some time later, Verrine was sitting down behind a long table in the conference room of the manor, idly watching her kin interact with each other in the dim light of the room.

There was no real trust in the Blackened Order, especially given the rapid change of leadership in the last two years or so. It wasn't uncommon for various members of the Order to slay the hosts of the other, especially considering the immortal lives and twisted sanity of many of its members. Murdering each other had become a game more than anything else for most of them.

Still, as of late the practise had turned more vicious than usual. The leadership crisis that faced the Blackened Order was unprecedented during its entire history. The Head of the Order had always been a stable, solid position for the other Denarians to gravitate to. Flaws and emotional issues aside, Meciel had been one of the greatest leaders of the Order, drawing her discarded brethren and practically creating the organisation from scratch. Her betrayal and subsequent dethroning had come as a shock but Nicodemus had quickly moved in to fill the gap. He was just as shrewd as Meciel with none of her hang-ups, quickly becoming just as efficient and cunning as Meciel had been.

His death had come as a terrible blow to the Order. The immortal man had led the charge against wizards, Knights, Fae and any other enemy that had dared to interfere in their plans. He had dallied against some of the more powerful mortals in existence, slaying quite a few of them as well. It had even been whispered that he had come across the legendary Merlin himself, founder of the White Council and the reclusive Wizarding World. The fact that Nicodemus had escaped alive, albeit bruised, battered and missing an arm, was considered a crowning achievement. His death came as a horrible blow to the power and confidence of the Order.

It was then that the Order began to take Meciél's new host more seriously. It seemed almost inconceivable that the boy, who had troubles in facing off against Deirdre a mere five years ago, had gained enough power to kill the Order's most powerful warrior.

Vesper's death was worse. Many in the Blackened Order had been optimistic that the last Denarian Lord would be able to rise to the occasion, even if she was not what she had once been. When Meciél and her host slew the other Denarian Lord in less than a year after Vesper had taken over, the Order panicked.

Meciél was coming back to take her revenge.

It was partly due to this fear that they had allowed Tessa to take the reins of the Order. Sure, she wasn't as cunning, shrewd, patient or powerful as their former leaders. But, in the face of such a terrible enemy, a paradoxical wizard wielding Hellfire in one hand and brandishing the ever-feared Sword of the Cross in the other, somebody had to do something and Tessa was willing. It was the first time in the Order's history that the mantle of leadership had been passed to a 'regular' Denarian.

It was sad, Verrine concluded in a bittersweet sort of way. For the first time since its inception, the Blackened Order of the Denarius was in true danger of being destroyed. The Great Denarian Lords had been slain, one turning on them with righteous fury. The increasing advancement of human society meant that their job had become much more dangerous- if easier. The unity of the Denarians, which had been held together by the Lords, had fractured. Even the most

mindless and insane of her kin had preferences to who should lead the Order. Just because Tessa had been the only one willing to lead the Order didn't mean that the others liked it. While there may have been no other choice, it wasn't uncommon to hear the occasional Denarian declared that Tessa was no Denarian Lord.

The worse part, Verrine thought, was Tessa didn't seem to care. She allowed the petty rivalries and differences of opinions to flare up until it seemed like the lesser Denarians were taking a new host body every day. It was partly why Verrine had sought out Meciél's Host. Tessa was leading the Order to the brink of destruction and Harry, as young as he was, was sure to topple the ancient organisation. Verrine would aid him and allow him to, and then she would do what she must and rebuild the Order from the ground up. She would construct it how it used to be back in the times of old and then, when the time was right, she was gladly hand it over to one of the Denarian Lords, even Meciél, and step back.

In her own way, Verrine was a patriot to the cause.

"Well, well, well, don't you look deep in thought?"

Verrine blinked and looked up.

"Tarsiel," she greeted cordially and extended her hand.

The sandy-haired man smiled at her charmingly but his eyes remained cold and calculating as he bent his head, his lips barely brushing the back of her knuckles. Verrine smiled politely and wondered if he would take offence if she were drive that hand into his face. She decided against it, merely because she had just had her nails filed to the perfect length and it would be a shame to chip them so soon.

"So tell me," Tarsiel said as he seated himself next to her. "What has the Lovely Rose of Rome occupied her time with lately?"

"Do you have to call me that?" Verrine asked with a pout. She inclined her head at him and smiled politely. "If you do it again, I might hurt you."

“Touché,” Tarsiel chuckled.

It was strange, Verrine reflected, that Tarsiel could be considered one of her closest friends. He was also her rival, partner and occasional bed-warmer. Verrine would have liked to have brought him in but she couldn’t trust him with her ambitions. The Denarian was like a leech, clamping on to stronger and more powerful allies and sucking the potential out of them. She would make sure Harry disposed of Tarsiel’s coin properly. She didn’t want him coming out for a few hundred years yet.

“It’s pitiful, isn’t it?” Tarsiel murmured.

Verrine followed his gaze to a couple of large, half-naked men chained to the walls. One was a pale, thin slip of a boy, barely Harry’s age. The other was a large dark-skinned man in his thirties. Both were foaming at the mouth as they jerked at the chains, desperately trying to claw at each other.

“Wild animals,” Verrine dismissed with a huff. “Our Brothers and Sisters are not all strong, Tarsiel. Those who fall to the Abyss must be contained.”

“Nicodemus could do with a single word,” Tarsiel said quietly. “And he never needed chains. The Denarian Lords did always manage to control our lesser brethren.”

“Nicodemus is dead,” Verrine rebuked mildly. “Meciel’s Host killed him. He also killed Vesper. The only Denarian Lord left is after our coins. We must make do with what we have.”

Tarsiel pursed his lips in a rather human-like manner. Common human gestures and signals were a sign that a Denarian had been present in the host for quite some time, enough time to become familiar with the body’s unique expressions and gestures.

“That may be true,” Tarsiel acknowledged reluctantly. He gestured to the other end of the table, where two other Denarian hosts were glaring at each other with barely-restrained malice. “I would prefer to

make do with a leader that can somehow get us to act like the thousand-year old divine beings that we are. I've seen classrooms of twelve year olds that get along better than us."

"Why were you in a classroom?"

"One of my previous hosts had unique tastes that I had to sate before I could get a stranglehold on his body," Tarsiel explained, sounding neither revolted nor disgusted by the implications in the sentence.

Morality was something that human beings had created. Everybody else usually ended up doing what they wanted to.

Verrine gave Tarsiel a wry smile, but it faded as the doors slammed open and Tessa stormed in. The other Denarians gave her a wide berth as she strode to the head of the table, looking absolutely furious. Even the wild Denarians bound by chains fell silent as the petite sorceress host sat down in her seat- which was bigger and more elaborate than any of the others, of course- and glared across the table.

Verrine straightened her back reflexively while inwardly frowning. That was one thing that Tessa had going for her- for the most part, she wore her heart on her sleeve. It was harder to tell with Nicodemus, who could be polite and calm up until the very moment he killed you. In contrast, it was very easy to tell when Tessa was furious over something.

She observed Tessa carefully. The immortal woman may have been a teenager in body but she was ancient in spirit and it showed. Verrine regarded the silver-haired girl and wondered if one day Harry would look like her, a young healthy body with an air of...wrongness...about him. Mortal bodies weren't meant to live forever and, although it didn't directly show, there was always something that nagged at others, even if only on the subconscious level. It was something that came with having a host too long.

"We have a problem," Tessa announced coldly. The entire room was silent as she raked her eyes over everybody. Tessa smiled grimly. "I'm waiting for somebody to ask me about how big the problem is."

“How big is the problem, Lady Lartessa?” Tarsiel spoke up from Verrine’s side.

Verrine glanced at the sandy-haired man next to her, who kept his eyes locked on Tessa’s. Something flashed between them and Verrine turned back to Tessa, just catching a slight nod of the leader’s head.

“Why don’t you tell me, Tarsiel?” Tessa asked in a back-and-forth that was too practised to be natural.

Verrine had a bad feeling about where this was going.

“Well, I’d say the problem is around five foot six, dark hair, blue eyes and quite ravishing, to be honest,” Tarsiel recited and Verrine flinched as a strong hand slammed down on her shoulder, squeezing it with great strength until she could hear her bones creaking in protest.

Her eyes wide, Verrine turned to Tarsiel who stared back at her coldly, his earlier friendliness gone.

“Ah, yes, and I forgot the most important point,” Tarsiel said, his gaze boring into Verrine as several of the suddenly-unchained Denarians strode forward and flanked Verrine’s seat. “Our problem is a traitor. Our problem serves the Host of Meciel. Our problem wants to kill us all.”

No. This wasn’t supposed to happen.

“Are you telling us that Verrine is a traitor?” asked Saluriel from the other side of the table. The table was silent and Verrine had everybody’s full attention.

She had been careful in her dealings. How had she been found out?

“I’m surprised, Verrine,” Tessa continued, a wicked smile on her face. “I didn’t even think you would show up. I suppose the allure of information was too much for you.”

She turned to the rest of the table and raised her voice.

"Verrine has betrayed the Order," she declared. "She has betrayed us!" Tessa swung her eyes back to Verrine, who had gone very still. "Verrine has been consorting with the host of Meciel. She has been passing on information of our whereabouts, actively seeking our demise."

"Are you certain?" Saluriel said carefully.

"I've known that we had a leak," Tessa answered. "So I had Namshiel start following some of you. Verrine has been making frequent trips to an apartment building in the center of London. With some further digging, I found out that the one and only Harry Potter has a residence there."

Verrine raised her head and glared at Tessa as the small girl tapped her fingers on the table. The smile on her face promised nothing but very bad things to Verrine, who was fighting the urge not to panic. It was another flaw of the human host- the more one dived into the sensations and pleasures of the flesh then the more one was susceptible to the mental and cognitive processes of the human body. In this case, it was a mixture of fear, shock, surprise and anger.

"T-This is a lie!" Verrine protested loudly, swelling up with righteous indignation. "How dare you excuse me of this?"

"Oh, shut up, you spoiled little bitch," Tessa cut in loudly.

Verrine fell silent.

"While you've spent your banishment here on Earth having fun and residing in luxury, I have been pushing the bounds of my limited powers," Tarsiel spoke up from beside her, his voice dripping with disgust. "My illusions are superb, better than you know. You couldn't hide from me, Verrine."

"Tarsiel..." Verrine whispered.

“Wait a moment!” Somebody interjected- a new host that Verrine hadn’t met before. Given that Tessa was prone to throwing coins at the first mortal who came across them, that particular fact wasn’t surprising. “If this Potter met up with her, how do we know that the meeting wasn’t compromised?”

“I was running surveillance on the Host’s apartment,” Tarsiel answered smoothly. “He was not in the room when Verrine entered, and she quickly left afterwards. That was when I lost her.”

“So how do you know that she didn’t meet him somewhere else?” the host pressed and Tarsiel’s smile flickered.

“It doesn’t matter,” Tessa snapped, breaking the sudden uneasiness of the room. “If he shows up here, then we’ll either kill him through our overwhelming numbers or we will flee and leave him without a spy to find us.”

“Lartessa, you can’t possibly...”

“I never liked you,” Tessa remarked casually. “I always thought you were too pompous, too uncaring of the cause. So I’m going to have fun when I punish you, Verrine. I’m going to rip you from your host body and place you somewhere safe for a thousand years, until the Void has ripped the sanity from you and you become nothing more than a beast.”

“What if you’re wrong?” Verrine asked quietly.

Tessa smiled cruelly. “Well, I never have liked you,” she drawled. Her eyes glowed as she licked her lips. “So, I won’t care what happens to you if...”

Verrine, who had slumped as Tessa had gone on, wrenched her shoulder sideways. There was an audible crack but Verrine didn’t even grimace as the emotion left her face. She wriggled free, stood up and backhanded the Denarian who was gripping her shoulder aside. The large man, twice the size of her host, literally went flying as Verrine raised her hands and boomed out an incantation.

The floors rocked and windows exploded in a great boom of noise as the other Denarians, many whose reflexes were just as good as her own, avoided her powerful spell and approached her menacingly. As she wrought her magic, barely feeling the crackling bolt of energy that seared off half her face, she could only ponder the irony that she was now depending on the one person she had planned on personally killing this night.

A/N: Hey guys. This is Part 2 of the end of the Denarian Arc. There's been a tremendous amount of feedback (often leading to massive tl;dr posts and debates) and frankly, a lot of it has been shuffled a tad to the side for the sake of convenience and entertainment. Still, my hat's off to DLP for their massive contribution and output for the chapter. Chapter 19 is mostly done, I just need to touch it up so it should be out in a day or so. I hope you enjoy this.

Harry adjusted the sheath that slung across his shoulders and waited impatiently in a scrub of bushes right outside the manor. It hadn't been too hard to slip in, actually. Guns or not, muggles were still muggles and they were still susceptible to Notice-Me-Not charms and muggle-repelling wards. Harry did tone it down a bit, though, as it would look slightly suspicious if whole patrols of men suddenly started clamouring about missing a doctor's appointment and the like. He also avoided the hellhounds, of which there were relatively few, thankfully, because he wasn't sure the wards would work on them. Hellfire had the tendency to make everything bigger and more badass than it should be, even dogs.

"And seven year old boys," Meciél added lightly from beside him.

Harry started, clutched his chest and whirled to her with a furious expression on her face. Meciél stared back calmly as Harry scowled and made a hushing noise.

"You are aware that nobody else apart from you can hear me?" Meciél asked.

Harry stared at her with a deadpan expression. He relayed his opinion to Meciél with a soft, almost inaudible grunt, and the middle finger. Meciél's lips twitched as Harry turned back to the manor, his mood switching back to deadly serious as he stared up at the opulent house before him. It wasn't that he hated his various apartments over the years, on the contrary, he had really gotten use to the low maintenance of them, but perhaps it was time to start thinking a little bigger.

Harry was cut out of his ponderings of real-estate prices and whether or not you could scrub Fiendfyre marks out of marble tiles by a subtle rumbling. He paused, his fingers flexing around his wand, and glanced around. The hellhounds were yapping and barking but their keepers didn't seem to know why. He surveyed the manor again and wasn't the least bit surprised when something rumbled again and a small section of the third floor abruptly exploded.

As the guards went on high alert and an honest-to-God siren started to blare. Harry palmed his face and sighed.

"Well, it wasn't quite the signal I was waiting for," he muttered.

It could have been his voice or it could have been that the hellhound was close enough to smell him behind his charms. Either way, a nearby hellhound lifted back its meaty head, its eyes burning with rage, and howled a defiant challenge. A patrol of running guards paused and turned as one to the hellhound, the expression's behind their balaclavas unreadable.

"Ah, fuck," Harry uttered.

He quickly reached into his pocket and pulled out a card- an Ace of Spades, to be exact. The back of the card looked as if it had been burned into a specific runic shape, which was currently glowing with a soft-blue colour.

"Well, they can't escape," Harry observed as he pocketed the card and stood up.

The movement was enough to dispel the subtle repelling charms on his person. To their credit, the guards didn't so much as pause at the weirdness of somebody magically appearing before them as they lifted their weapons to their waist and opened fire.

The loud 'tat-tat-tat' of the machine guns roared through the open night and attracted the attention of everybody present. For his part, Harry shielded himself from the first volley of guns and he grinned as the guards stopped firing, reaching for fresh magazines.

“That hurt,” he deadpanned sarcastically. He paused, ignoring the clicks as the guards reloaded as one at speeds to put professional soldiers at shame, and concentrated. He opened his mouth and spoke a Word.

The world paused and colour seemed to disappear as the guards paused, frozen stiff. The Word shot out around them, bleeding the colour out of everything that the very acoustics touched. Harry was the only one unaffected in a fifty-metre or so radius as guards and Hellhounds froze in place for a split-second. Then, with an odd squelching noise, the word reasserted itself and exploded in waves of colour. Harry shielded himself as the colours that had bled out of everything exploded in powerful blooms of light, one shade after the other. The air was literally filled with multitudes upon multitudes of nova-rainbows.

Harry strolled past the guards as they stumbled and wavered across the grass amidst the randomly-occurring balls of flaring coloured light. Apart from causing a momentary pause in living organisms as the foreign word rippled across them and the light effects, the Word also introduced painful consequences to those caught in the effects when the light shows stopped and the ‘colour’ tried to return to where it had come from- quite often ripping the object apart. Harry had seen it happen to the occasional chair and desk during his practise and he was tempted to stick around and see the effect on a human. But, he did have business to do, so it was with great reluctance that Harry tore himself away from the bamboozled and confused guards, many who were firing blindly into the lights and hitting their own comrades, and approached the manor.

The tank at the other end of the driveway didn’t appreciate Harry’s efforts. As Harry strolled up the steps he heard a strange whirring noise and paused. He turned around and his lips parted in an involuntary expression of surprise as the tank swivelled its barrel at him.

And then it shot him.

One moment, Harry was standing on the stairs. The next moment, he was in the manor, grunting and wheezing as he slid down a wall, little

bits of plaster falling into his hair and onto his clothes in the shape of fine white powder. He grunted, coughed and winced as he felt the sizzling flesh on his palm.

“That was...ow!” The Denarian groaned. “I...don’t wanna move.”

He glanced dizzily at the wreckage around him, his head swimming from the blow it had just received when crashing into a wall at a fair speed. It had probably been a nice hall before a tank had shot at it, but now all he could see was dust, plaster, broken tiles and a large jagged hole leading to the grounds. The sizzling in his hand continued to burn him, and when he glanced down he saw the Sword of the Cross had somehow made it into his hand and was currently burning off his flesh with great vengeance, silvery power seeping through his leather gloves and rendering them useless. It pissed him off when that happened.

“I...oh,” Harry muttered, stumbling to his feet. He paused and gazed at the glowing blade incredulously. “Hang on. Did I just block a tank shell with a sword?”

‘Try not to think about it too much,’ Meciél advised even as Harry felt the tell-tale warmth of her powers knitting back his torn muscles and flesh. Something in his chest shifted with a loud crack and breathing became a little bit easier. ‘God works in mysterious ways- often for no other purpose than to annoy those who don’t understand them.’

“But it’s a piece of metal!” Harry grumbled under his breath. He ducked behind a piece of rubble as a flashlight shined through the dust-filled air. “The velocity of the tank shell...the explosive power in it...even magically, it doesn’t make sense.”

He paused and he concentrated around him. To him, the air was literally humming with power, blankets of harsh magic swarming all over him, dulling his senses and lashing out at him with the kind hatred and fury only found in the half-sentience of wards. They were probably pissed off that there was a large hole in their otherwise perfect house.

Wards could get attached to their properties if cast well. Harry only needed to point at Hogwarts to prove his point. He had heard stories, myths really, of wards somehow taking temporary corporeal forms. Meciél had always told him that they were bogus but Harry liked to think otherwise.

‘Your apartment wards are not going to take human form and, as you put it, sex you up,’ Meciél said with a sigh. ‘Now, we need to leave. We have crossed the threshold into the manor and are under full subjugation of the wards. We are no more powerful than the guards now.’

“It’s alright,” Harry reassured her as he stealthily darted from the hall. “We planned for this.”

Despite his lack of external-based magic, Meciél had full command on his internal magic and the healing was mostly done by the time he had navigated his way through the hallways. Verrine had gone over the blueprints to the house for him several times and Meciél had remembered it. All he had to do reach the room and activate his trump card before the Denarians decided to flee. Preferably before the guards found him as well- they might actually get a lucky...shot and kill...him...before he could...

Harry paused in his step and stopped. Suddenly, a nagging doubt filled him. Verrine’s intentions weren’t exactly subtle, especially with the way she was throwing herself at him all of the time. What if this was all a trap designed to lure him to his death?

“Oi,” Harry barked- albeit softly- to the Sword of the Cross. “Can you, I dunno, glimmer or something if this is a trap?”

The sword remained blank.

“Okay then. Glimmer if this isn’t a trap.”

Again, there was nothing.

“Fuck,” Harry groaned. He could see the room he was supposed to enter up ahead and sighed. “Well, she hasn’t betrayed me yet.”

Opening the door, Harry was relieved to find that the room was conspicuously empty of large men and automatic weapons. He was also incredibly pleased to find that his trump card had been laid down on the floor, crushing some of the furniture with its enormous weight.

“Well,” Harry addressed the large slab of plaster and wooden beams before him. “I hope this works.

He rubbed his hands together as he surveyed the intricate runes, some no larger than his thumbnail, carved into the slab. To design wards that would overpower or dismantle the manors wards would have taken weeks, if not months, to create- even for Harry. Luckily for him, he had already create a large ward scheme built prior to the raid that only needed a few hours of tweaking to get the desired results he needed.

“Let’s do this,” the Denarian Knight muttered to himself as he approached the large, ragged chunk of his apartment roof. He cocked his head, scanning the runes to make sure none had been damaged. “Let’s rock and roll. Let’s go and kick some arse. I’ll be back. Let’s do eeet!”

He pressed a few of the runes and allowed some of the splattered blood on his shirt to trickle onto them.

‘The very least you could do is find some original one liners of your own.’

“Don’t you know? I steal everything I say.”

It was done. The rippling wave from Harry’s preparations shot out from the slab of plaster all through the mansion. The Denarian Lord had to admit that his plan worked flawlessly as the wards and surrounding energy began tremble. The ground shuddered and the walls cracked as a loud high-pitched scream shot through the manor, the death throes of the wards shattering windows and bursting eardrums for all.

Harry quickly ducked out of the room and wasted no time in running the hell away as his own ward scheme began to shudder and tremble. Essentially, he had attempted to 'merge' the two ward schemes together. Given that one was inside the other and the conflicting natures of the magic involved, it could have only ended badly. He had estimated that the wards might have shattered, so it was good that it had worked.

An explosion lit up the corridor behind him and he stumbled, crashing down into the floor. Pieces of debris shot over him, Harry briefly recognised the twisted burnt wreck of the door soaring ahead and lodging itself in a wall.

It was a pity that his own ward scheme had been destroyed. Not only did it leave his apartment vulnerable, but he had liked them. There had always been the chance the wards would have been grateful for being created, taken human form and sexed him up!

'It wasn't going to...duck!' Meciél began, only to shout a warning at him.

Harry obeyed and stayed down as a long, spindly tail burst through the wall and swiped its bladed end at his neck height. The tail paused as Harry scrambled back on the ground, allowing the Hellfire to rage through him, strengthen his frame and pour into his wand. The tail seemingly sensed his movement and dove down at him. With a careless swipe that somehow turned into a perfect parry, Harry batted the tail aside with the Sword of the Cross and pressed his wand against the wall from where the tail had come from.

"Frendo!"

A dull roar rang through the air and Harry's vision was engulfed by sapphire light as his wand literally buckled his arm. The dark curse left the tip of his wand- there was shudder, the wall exploded outwards and the tail disappeared from his vision.

He stood up, the sword glowing with silver in his left hand and his wand glowing with crimson in his right. His breathing was harsh, his heart was surging and his smile threatened to stretch off his cheeks

as he surveyed the rubble. Whatever twisted bestial form that Denarian had had was only barely recognisable now, its body twisted, mangled and missing giant chunks as it lay amongst the rubble and the dust-filled air.

“One blow? Man, they don’t make Denarians like they used to,” Harry muttered sourly.

He continued on, his pace quick and furious as he came across the next opponent- a dozen men with guns. With his full powers at his disposal, they stood little chance against the potent spells that he levelled that way and he dispatched them with ease, the last one shrieking in agony as he cut off her head.

“The Host is here!” came the panicked call from up the hall. “Everybody, remember your orders. Saluriel, open the portal, quickly!”

“Hurry!”

“Way to act like ancient, mystical fallen angels, guys,” Harry grunted as he turned a corner and paused.

Before him were two Denarians, one a short, thin man with a rather slimy air around him and the other a tall blonde woman that Harry wouldn’t have minded getting to know better if the circumstances had been different. Before them was a slit in the air, a portal to the Nevernever and the realms of the Fae. Harry did nothing and watched on as the two Denarians stepped into the portal, a slight smile curving his lips.

At the same time, halfway through entering the portal, both of the Denarians paused. The man shuddered and howled as white strands of chaotic energy wrapped around him and engulfed him. He disappeared in a flash of light at the same time as the woman, who opened her mouth and screamed as glowing energy poured from every pore of her body and turned her into nothing. The portal shimmered and disappeared as a fine spray of ash fell to the ground. A moment later and with a clatter of metal, two silver coins rolled out of the ash and clanged together, toppling over with a surprisingly loud thump.

“Flee on sight?” Harry remarked to himself and scoffed. “Please. Did they think I wouldn’t find a way around that?”

Now that his presence had been confirmed, it was almost guaranteed that he had already won the battle. Meciél’s emotions spilled into his, a vicious hungering for revenge and a sharp jolt of satisfaction at every pile of ash they passed, silver coins lying silent before the heap. Harry didn’t say anything, aware that his body was also thrumming with the utmost in satisfaction and emotions that was almost too hard to describe. Was this it? Was this really it? The end of the Blackened Order, gone with a whimper and without as much as a decent fight?

In a way, Harry almost pitied them. If he were to ever die- not that he’d ever let it happen- he would want to go out with a bang. Still, he thought, there was a strange sort of irony in the proceedings. In a way, the Blackened Order was killed by their cowardice and desire to flee.

Still, curiosity egged him on and he found himself approaching the room where the initial explosion had come from. What had happened to Verrine? Was she lying in wait for him, ready to strike now that the Order had crumbled? Had she tried to flee with her kin, perhaps to keep up pretences, and died with them? This was a trump card that he couldn’t allow his semi-loyal spy to know about.

What he found was surprising. The room had been wrecked, the table overturned and the chairs scattered around on the floor. The corpse of a large meaty man lay by the wall, his neck twisted around with brute force. Two corpses lay before him, one of a man with sandy blonde hair and a woman in fine silks. The man’s cause of death was obvious, especially with the woman’s hands wrapped around his throat. The woman had died by some kind of powerful spell, which had stabbed a gory hole through her chest- precisely where her heart had been. Harry would have been impressed by the accuracy and potency of the spell- he’d have been hard pressed to survive such an instant blow even with the regeneration powers of a Denarian Lord- if the woman hadn’t been so familiar to him.

Verrine's blank and beautiful eyes had rolled into the back of her head as she lay there. Harry watched with an expressionless face as something in her throat bulged and spat out of her mouth. A silver coin struck the ground, rolled across the floor and slowly spun down by his foot, the sounds echoing greatly in the empty room.

Verrine was dead. Harry wasn't quite sure how to feel about that yet but he was instantly put on guard. Verrine was no slouch in the fighting department and had given Harry a few enjoyable battles in her times, even coming close to killing him once. Harry would have rated her in the top seven or eight of the Blackened Order in fighting abilities. Whoever had killed her might still be around.

"What the..."

Harry's head shot up and his blazing emerald gaze locked onto the teenage girl who had just strolled into the room. Silvery-whitish hair wafted down from her head to her shoulders and her pale skin seemed to gleam with an otherworldly beauty. A heart-shaped face gazed up at him and two gorgeous eyes appraised Harry carefully. Despite Harry never meeting this girl before, Meciel's ire seeped into him and her name was on the tip of his tongue.

"Lartessa."

The girl surveyed him keenly and then, to Harry's surprise, sighed.

"Oh great," she snapped. "It's you. This is just what I fucking need."

Harry was taken aback. He opened his mouth to say something but was rudely cut off as Tessa sighed again and placed her hands on her hips- her very nice hips, as Harry noted with his well-trained eye.

"What do you want, you little shithead?" Tessa demanded. "I suppose you're the reason why people are disintegrating into portals?"

"Um...I've come to kill you," Harry answered awkwardly, feeling rather put out. He brandished his wand for emphasis and scratched his head. "Meciel's Host? Been killing all your dudes?"

"You're here to kill me," Tessa said and rolled her eyes. "What a surprise."

Perhaps it was her sarcasm that was getting to him but Harry was getting the strangest feeling from the girl in front of him. It didn't help that Meciel was blazing in his head, to the point where it felt like he was getting a very bad headache.

"You are Tessa, right?" He tried to confirm.

"Yeah," Tessa answered slowly. "Who the hell else would I be?"

"And...you're the leader of the Blackened Order of Denarius?" Harry continued. "I just wanna make sure."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Tessa snapped.

Harry shifted on his feet as raw power coiled around her, snapping off her skin like a cloak of pure magic. The vast power before him answered his questions much better than the girl herself and he nodded, preparing himself for what was coming.

"Well?" Tessa asked. "Are you going to answer?"

"Ah, sorry," Harry said automatically, cocking his head at the ancient Denarian before him. "It's just that...you know, I thought you'd be all imperious and ancient and mystical like Nicodemus and Vesper were. You're...not what I expected."

"You might have noticed but that kind of style didn't work out too well for them," Tessa deadpanned. "Instead, I decided to be a complete and utter bitch." She gestured carelessly at Verrine's corpse. "That little whore should have told you that."

"Surprisingly, you didn't come up much," Harry retorted. He glanced down at Verrine speculatively. "That's some pretty nice work though. Looks like a powerful spell completely ripped through her chest and vaporised her heart."

Harry nudged the corpse with his feet and frowned. "Hmm...there's scorched skin..." he paused and sniffed the air. "Is that ozone? Yeah, it's ozone. Her hair is standing partly on end...ooh! A lightning based spell!"

Tessa nodded curtly.

"That's pretty cool," Harry admitted and grinned. "Not as good as fire, but still pretty good. You're pretty good."

Tessa narrowed her eyes and regarded him shrewdly from the other side of the room. She had made no attempt to attack him as he had 'surveyed' Verrine's body, instead, content to stand there and run her eyes up and down his figure.

"I could say the same about you," she admitted. "I don't suppose there's any way I can make you reconsider this at all? You're just what this Order needs." She bared her teeth at him. "Fresh blood."

"Can't," Harry shrugged apologetically. "I really, really wanna kill you."

"I can give you money, power, women," Tessa offered carelessly. She paused and grinned slyly. "I can give you myself if you want. You can have all the fun you want with me. Fuck me senseless for all I care- I'd probably enjoy it."

"Oh," Harry uttered with dawning understanding after a moment's pause. "So that's how you win all your fights. You screw them to death."

Tessa smiled.

"Seriously, do you offer to have sex with all of your enemies?"

"Do I offer to fuck all of my enemies?" Tessa repeated. "Occasionally," she answered honestly. "There was this wizard this one time...something about a gangster? Or was it a kid?" she trailed off.

“Anyway,” she continued with a sensuous smile, running a hand through her glimmering silver hair. “I find that it can be a real ice-breaker- a ball-breaker too, if they’re in the mood for it. I’ve made more than my fair share of alliance by fucking the other side.”

“Lovely,” Harry deadpanned. “You’re a whore.”

Tessa smiled at him with that infuriating smile and giggled.

“Oh, Harry- can I call you Harry?” she asked and then continued as if his answer didn’t matter at all. “I can tell that you’re still a youngling to us.”

“What’s that mean?” Harry asked suspiciously.

“Don’t try to apply human morality to us Hosts,” Tessa remarked. She giggled again and allowed a hand to trail down her body, past her tight shirt and to the apex of her jeans. “We’re beyond that, Harry. Me and you- we’re beyond humankind. We’re the Chosen, the Fists of Hell, the Blackened Denarius and a dozen other titles that admittedly sound less cool than those ones.”

Tessa smiled at him, a smile that shouldn’t have come from a jailbait teenager girl.

“We can do whatever we want.”

The sentence was said with such a tone that Harry stiffened. His lips unconsciously parted as Tessa smiled again. It was no glamour, Harry deduced, and it wasn’t as if Tessa was that attractive. She was by no means ugly but Harry had screwed the Winter Lady before- which pretty much made everybody else a nine tops. It was the freedom that Tessa carried around her, Harry decided, that made her so attractive. It was the freedom of a thousand year old human like himself who was free from the burdens of mortality that made her so endearing at that moment.

It was a pity that he was going to kill her.

“My, my,” Harry said mildly as Tessa started to stride around the room. Harry followed her and the two circled each other at a distance, power thrumming between them. “What would Nicodemus say? You two were pretty tight, right? I mean, you did have a daughter together- Deidre?”

“Nicodemus? Why would I care what he thinks? Tessa snorted. She paused. “Thought, what he thought. He’s dead now- can’t think much. How did you do that, by the way?” she asked with genuine curiosity. “I’d considered taking him down a few times but never could figure out how.”

“I strangled him,” Harry answered honestly.

“I knew it, Tessa crowed in triumph. She looked viciously happy as she grinned at him. “See, the powers of that noose of his were amazing but the thing was a giant bullseye on his back. Any halfwit with a good grip could have killed him if he let ‘em. What an idiot.”

“Did you just call me a half-wit?” Harry asked, looking annoyed.

“He was always an idiot,” Tessa mused, as if she hadn’t heard Harry. Harry was tempted to curse her but was strangely reluctant to break whatever it was they had between them. “He was always plotting and planning and weaving and scheming...always in the future, never in the present- unless he was fucking our daughter. Man, Deirdre was such a kinky bitch. Always a Daddy’s girl...”

Harry didn’t know how to respond to that.

“Let me tell you something, Harry, and this is a freebie from me,” Tessa said, suddenly serious. “

“What?” Harry asked guardedly as he circled her.

“Remember this,” Tessa said, and her tone belayed her appearance. “You always gotta live for the moment. I’m a thousand and something- I’ve lost track, really- and I can tell you that you always have to live it like it’s your last. You don’t know when a knight or a vampire or a demon...or a former Denarian Lord...”

Harry smirked.

“...is going to come and kill you,” Tessa continued. She grinned at him, a strangely genuine smile. “In the odd chance that you win here, have your fun, enjoy yourself and don’t have any regrets. It’s what I’ve done and I’ve had a fucking blast living through the ages. Like my swearing? Fucking is such a great fucking word. We didn’t have this back in early days.”

“Right,” Harry uttered cautiously.

“That was always Nicodemus’ problem,” Tessa murmured thoughtfully. She scratched her head. “He was always peering off into the distance looking for his Armageddon. It was always about the ‘ends’ and he never really let himself loose and enjoy the ‘means’.”

“Okay,” Harry prodded carefully. “I’m gonna try and kill you now.”

“Man, Nicodemus was such a dickwad,” Tessa exclaimed wrinkled her nose and Harry let out a strangled and barely-suppressed snort of laughter. She turned her alluring eyes on him and grinned, baring her perfect teeth. “Hey, Harry. You have...fun, right?”

Harry stared at her and then barked with laughter.

“You know,” he said conversationally. “If I wasn’t about to kill you, I think I could have liked you.”

“Get over yourself, kid,” Tessa snorted with laughter. “You’re good, I’ll give you that, but you’re not that good. From what I’ve heard, Nicodemus was killed by nothing short of a fluke and Vesper picked a fight with you at the end of her host’s lifespan. I’ve been killing little shits like you for centuries.”

“Kid?” Harry repeated dangerously.

“No insults intended,” Tessa said automatically. She narrowed her eyes but was looking far too much at ease for Harry’s liking. “You’re powerful, I’ll definitely give you that. You’re also smart- this trap of

yours was spectacular. But I've got thousands of battles behind me with some of the most powerful people in this world. Nicodemus was a one-trick pony, Vesper was just incompetent...and Meciél, well, Meciél betrayed us all."

"What are you getting at?" Harry replied guardedly

Tessa smiled.

"I'm a sorceress," she said. "Do you know what that means? It means that I don't have any fancy magical foci or complex rituals. It means I summon large parts of my power and throw lightning at people and- trust me on this- there's only so many ways you can do that without getting inventive. You're more powerful, yes, but I'm going to bet I'm more skilled than you."

"That's alright," Harry said and smiled cruelly. "I like it when people underestimate me."

"You're pathetic," Tessa snapped, her good humour fading. "You're claiming that I'm underestimating you- but aren't you underestimating me as well?"

Harry considered that.

"You've had one fight where you were vastly outmatched, one fight where your opponent was literally dying and you've just breezed through the rest of the weaklings in the ranks," Tessa continued as she circled Harry, who was absently dispelling trickles of her power as it hit the ground- probably in an attempt to trap him.

"So you're better than that lot?" Harry explained and immediately shifted stances to a more guarded one. "Thanks. Anything else you want to tell me? Critical weaknesses? Your own 'noose'?"

Tessa smiled thinly.

"You've been with those powers for eight or so years. You're way out of your league, kid. Meciél's been filling your head with delusions of

grandeur, all to spurn you on to do her dirty work for her," Tessa said. She regarded him and smirked. "We're a lot alike, you know."

"Really?" Harry asked lightly, cocking his head. An Avada Kedavra to the face should do it to start off, followed by a combo of fire spells and finished off with a Word- if Tessa was too slow.

"Yeah," Tessa answered and was suddenly all smiles once more. She bounced up and down on her feet. "Listen closely, kid. I'm 'you' in a thousand years. Because I'm such a nice girl, I'll make my offer again. You've had your little spat with the Order, killed a few lackeys here and there, but you're up against the top sorceress of the Order. Nicodemus had swordplay. Vesper had her political machinations and me? I blow things up with magic."

"Did you just call me a kid again?" Harry deadpanned.

She grinned, her face immediately coming back to life. "Yeah, you're a little kid. I bet you have a little kiddy dick too!"

She cooed at him like he was a baby and Harry felt his eye twitch.

"Right," he said furiously. "Nobody insults my penis and lives. Now I'm really going to kill you."

"Oh yeah?" Tessa smirked and leaned forward. Her eyes glinted. "Prove it!"

"Okay then," Harry said tightly and levelled his wand at her. "Avada Kedavra!"

The green jet of light soared harmlessly over Tessa as she ducked under it. She had an admonishing look on her face as she wagged her finger at him.

"Ah, no, no, no," she chided. "I've heard about that spell. Instant death and no way to block it. That's cheating!"

"Cheating? It's a fight to the death?"

“Yeah, but it’s the ‘Final Battle’ between the Order and Meciel’s Host. We need to have, like, an epic battle of massive power and that.” Tessa rolled her eyes. “Man, don’t you read?”

“Books are boring!” Harry growled. He flicked his wand and summoned a great gout of fire that raged across the carpeted floor, turning the cool air into a blistering wave of wind.

Tessa crouched into a strange stance that Harry immediately thought was some kind of martial arts. She took a step back, put her left hand forward with a slightly bent elbow and dropped her right hand so that her palm was on her thigh. As the fire raged at her, she yelled something out in a barbaric tongue and pushed.

A rippling force shot out of her hand, slammed into the fire and lifted it clean up off the carpet. Tessa spoke another incantation and the rolling ball of flames was thrown out of the window and onto the grounds below. Harry barely had the chance to blink when Tessa took a step back, her back leg sweeping up as she spun around and swapped hands. The leg came down and the long conference table was flipped up and hurled at Harry at the same time as Tessa thrust out her palm and threw a bolt of lightning at him.

Harry’s mind raced and he immediately sent Hellfire into his back, initiating the last remnants of his permanently crippled demonic form. Two giant wings of bone shot out of his back, slammed into the table and, using its momentum, hurled it at the lightning bolt in a split-second. The lightning bolt tore through the wood and shattered it to pieces as it dissipated. It was unable to stop its momentum but Tessa clenched her fist, flicked her index finger and blasted the debris aside with another blast of crackling power. Harry grinned and Tessa stiffened, having to roll out of the way as Harry sprung his own trap—large chunks of the ceiling slamming down into floor hard enough crack the floor.

Harry was immediately on the offensive and Tessa grunted, her left hand whirling around as she deflected spell after spell, coiling her fingers and zapping a few of the potent curses out of the air with her lightning. Harry’s lips twitched as the Denarian sorceress was quickly pushed back by the rapidly furious pace of his attack, blocking or

dodging curses that left gigantic holes in walls or produced enough heat to start liquefying nearby metal objects. It was only when Tessa managed to conjure a lightning bolt, her face tightened and intent, which almost clipped Harry in his fervour that he paused.

"Well," Harry admitted as the strong scent of ozone and smoke filled his nose. He grinned. "That was pretty cool."

"Your reflexes are just awesome," Tessa praised. She grinned and Harry noted the flush of her neck and the swell of her breasts as she breathed in and out. "I really wish you'd join us."

Harry inclined his head and was about to flick his wand when a resounding explosion came from outside, drifting in from the large jagged hole in the wall. Tessa cocked her head as Harry shrugged.

"I hope that fireball didn't hit my car." Tessa frowned.

"Siagrus!" Harry snapped, his wand blazing through a dozen flicks and swishes in a split second- to the point where it looked like he had merely flicked it.

Tessa jumped back, hurling another crackling bolt of lightning at Harry as the ground beneath her feet shimmered and caught fire. The floor fell away, revealing the room beneath it, as she spun around, her hair fanning out around her and Harry only caught a glimmer of movement before something whizzed by his face. A conjured shield of flickering blue energy buzzed around him, pinging as a wave of projectiles slammed into it. It was her hair, Harry deduced as he took a quick glance at the wall behind him, which had somehow sharpened into thin needle-like objects.

"Take this!" Tessa roared as she thrust out her hand again. Her right sent another lance of energy at him while her left caught the searing blast of flames and dispelled it harmlessly.

Harry's wings crossed over his chest and the lightning struck them, dissipating into nothingness as it came into contact with the sheer amount of Hellfire running through the bony appendages. Harry's response, a rising wave of Fiendfyre that tore through the roof and

obliterated most of the remaining conference room, surged forward in the visage of a Bonewyrm. Tessa took a step back, spun around and thrust out both of her hands. She yelled something and the Fiendfyre exploded.

Harry automatically flinched as his retinas were burned by the flash and ducked his head. Even so, his last image of Tessa had her flinching in surprise as her deflection spell turned the mass of raging cursed fire into a mass of raging uncontrolled cursed fire. His ears picking up the slight hisses and whizzing noises of Tessa's strands of hair shooting out at him. His blood surged as his fuzzy vision almost instantly returned and he lashed out with his wand in a whip-like motion. A thin stream of fire arose from the roaring fires around him, centred on his wand and then expanded out into a fiery whip. Harry lifted the wand and the whip coiled around him and lashed out with great force.

Tessa blocked the blow easily with one hand. She was smiling; an almost-crazed smile of enjoyment on her face as she batted away the next two blows, all the while avoiding the Fiendfyre that nipped at her heels. The fourth blow, however, made her frown as the fiery whip broke apart into three smaller ones. Harry brought the three-tailed whip of flame down on Tessa. Two of them coiled around her arms and dug in tight, searing through flesh and blood. The third lanced at her like a fiery spear.

Tessa seemingly ignored the painful fires eating away at her appendages as she caught the third with her hands, which were shimmering with an almost imperceptible glow. She barked out something and electric-like power coiled around her hands and zapped up the whips. Harry immediately let the spell go as the lightning raced at him across the fire. There was a small gap between him and the spell as he took a step back but Tessa gestured with her burning arm and the lightning expanded and engulfed him with a roar. Harry was thrown back by the impact and slammed into the crumbled wall behind him, wincing as his muscles twitched and ached as the power of the spell faded away. When he looked up again, Tessa had thrown off the fire binding her arms and was gazing at them in annoyance.

"This is annoying," Tessa said lightly. She smiled, but Harry could see past her transparent expression on her face by looking into her stormy and furious eyes.

Despite her complaints, Harry could already see her burns fading away and healing up. There was magic weaving around her wounds, Harry deduced, narrowing his eyes at the way her hand was twitching.

"Oh, bite me," Harry grumbled. "Why do all of my enemies have to throw me into a fucking wall? Seriously, do you know how many times somebody's done something that makes me hit a wall? I usually end up with a broken rib or something?"

"What about now?"

"No, but it really hurt," Harry complained. He tapped the scorched and half-crumbled wall behind him. "I think it has a supporting brace in it or something. I usually go right through them, or they at least crack and stuff."

"Wow," Tessa uttered. She grinned at him. "You really do get thrown around a lot."

"I fucking hate walls," Harry growled.

There was a loud cracking noise, both Tessa and Harry paused for a split second and then the floor groaned and collapsed inwards. Both Denarians fell with the rubble and slammed onto the floor of the room below. Harry was already casting a spell before he had hit a ground and flicked his wand at the debris.

"Scindo Vellere!"

The mass-banishment charm sent the crumbling and sometimes fiery remnants of the floor shooting at Tessa. The other Denarian cried out as she was battered on all sides, managing a hasty lightning bolt that tore through a large piece of debris and came dangerously close to Harry. Harry grinned, his eyes sparkling maliciously, and again summoned Fiendfyre, which took the massive form of a Bone Wrym beast. The Fiendfyre roared, the sound of a thousand explosions

making the walls quake, and tore through the floor as it surged at Tessa.

The silver-haired Sorceress cursed out loud, slammed both hands on the ground and the floor abruptly gave way again. Harry tumbled into the hole, ignoring the blinding pain as he slammed his face into a piece of carpeted debris, and the pair fell to the room below the room below the conference room. He slammed into the ground and groaned.

“Walls and floors,” he growled. “Fucking walls and fucking floors as well...”

This time, it was Tessa’s turn to strike first as she surged up, absently throwing away a piece of debris bigger than herself, and regaining her stance. Electricity coiled up around her, surging through her with a loud crackling noise. Harry staggered up and brought his wand up as the lightning took the form of a spectre above Tessa, glaring down at Harry.

It surged at him but parted as Harry deflected it with a silent push of his wand. Tessa let out a laugh that he could barely hear over the din of the crackling monster and moved the spectre with her fingers like one might move a marionette. It lashed out at Harry again, who deflected the blow with his wand. This time, blazing electricity coiled around him and lashed out from him from behind. Harry glanced over his shoulder, his eyes widening in shock, as the lightning took the form of a lance and plunged into his back- only to disappear with a loud crack as a silver light flared around him.

Harry reached up and pulled out the Sword of the Cross from his back, ignoring the stinging sensation as the light managed to seep past his gloves and sear into his skin. Tessa eyed the weapon with fascination, dropping her hands and letting the remnants of her spell disappear.

“That’s...” Tessa trailed off with a distinct look of disgust on her face. Her playfulness had disappeared and suddenly the expression she wore on her face looked as old as she was. “I hate those things.”

“I’m not too fond of it either,” Harry admitted darkly. The sword flared, as if feeling indignation and Harry gritted his teeth as the light seared into his leather-clad palm. “That said, it’s really good at killing people like us so I get used to it.”

Tessa said nothing but her hand rose up again and a bolt of lightning blasted out from coiled fingers. Harry held the sword aloft and allowed the searing lance of energy to strike harmlessly against the glowing sword, which throbbed painfully in his hands under the power of the blow. Tessa remained emotionless as Harry grinned and hefted the sword over his shoulder.

“Fine,” she said darkly. She regarded the sword carefully and nodded to herself. “Have it your way, you pathetic fool.”

She tapped the ground with her foot and Harry only had a brief moment to feel dismayed as the floor around them shattered, crumbled and broke away. He was more prepared this time and fell gracefully, deflecting another bolt of lightning from the free-falling sorceress with a one-handed swiped of the sword. The bolt struck his sword and while the lightning was defused, the power of the spell knocked the sword out of his hands. He dropped to the floor below as Tessa gave a cry of triumph, paused for a moment and concentrated.

As Tessa summoned a storm of lightning to assail him, Meciell and Harry worked as one to decipher a word. His head swam with strange and bizarre thoughts and images flashed through his eyes that he couldn’t understand. He opened his mouth and said a Word. Almost instantly, a loud wind howled through the room as the Word sucked in the very particles in the air with its sheer force. Tessa’s eyes widened and she redirected her powerful spell at reverberations the Word was causing. The lightning struck against the ball of compressed matter hovering before Harry and was sucked in as piece of debris began to lift off the ground, breaking apart as the Word sucked them all in. A small, notable sphere of absolute black was beginning to form before him, sucking in air and wispy silver particles drifting from Harry’s sword.

Harry grinned at Tessa even as blood dribbled from his mouth and his throat burned from the inside out and lifted up his wand to aim it at

her. Tessa immediately threw out her hands and closed her eyes as Harry banished the resonating Word at her- the effort sending him blasting backwards into yet another wall. As the ball shot at Tessa, the silver-haired girl sent a powerful buzz of...something...through the wall of the room and was suddenly lifted off her feet. She slammed into the wall with enough force that she broke through the plaster and disappeared from sight. The ball zoomed past where she had been standing and broke through the wall, disappearing from sight.

A moment later, Tessa crashed through the wall again- this time on her feet and with a handy bolt of lightning. She was gaping at Harry.

“Did you just throw a black hole at me?” she demanded.

Harry wanted to say that it wasn't a real black hole, but he merely grimaced and gestured at throat. Tessa frowned but the Denarian Lord got her attention again by first gesturing at her and then the wall. His question was obvious: how the hell did you survive that?

“Trade secret, kid,” she said with a grin. She lifted up her hand and cocked her head. “You’ve got some pretty flashy stuff. Whatever that was I could feel the incantation booming through my head but for the life of me- or Imariel- we don’t know what it was.”

Imariel was probably Tessa’s fallen, Harry guessed, but remained silent as Meciel repaired his torn and battered throat. He’d been hoping that that Word would have been enough to end this before it got all ‘Final Battle’ on them.

“You’re good yourself,” Harry answered, eying her carefully. “How are you not a Denarian Lord? You’re better than Vesper.”

“They said my mindset was a detriment to the cause,” Tessa remarked casually. “They never said it again though. I took a little bit of offence to that and did what you did- trashed one of our bases and killed a lot of our guys. They couldn’t get rid of me though. I’m too magic as what Nicodemus was to the sword.”

Tessa smirked and Harry tensed as his wand zipped up. Lightning and fire lashed out at each other in a beautiful display of power, crackling bolts zapping at searing rushes of fire. The air was filled with the booms of thunderclouds and the roars of volcanic explosions. Unlike many of his other battles, this was two raging powers clashing with each other- one with innate power and the other with power collected over centuries and centuries of immortality. It was hard to tell who had the edge here. The spells faded and Tessa and Harry repeated it, trying to direct their power past each other's defence and stab it into the other. Harry had to admit, if she was to magic as what Nicodemus had been to the sword, then she was to lightning as to what Harry was to fire. The control over her spells, right to the tiniest crackle of power, was terrifying

So this was what he would be like in a thousand years? Except, of course, much more powerful than an ingrate would never come up and challenge him like he was doing to her.

As fire and lightning died, they tried it a third time. This time, Harry's fire was moving sluggishly and he frowned. Tessa's lightning was also moving erratically and the scowl on her face suggested that it had nothing to do with her. Abruptly, fire and lightning abandoned each other and their masters and slammed into the wall on the far side of the room, disappearing through the sudden mass of cracks and splinters.

"What was that?" Tessa asked him.

"I...dunno..." Harry rasped.

"Harry," Tessa called out carefully, eyeing the cracking and crumbling wall as a rumble began to shift under their feet. "How long does that little black hole of yours last?"

"...minute..." Harry answered roughly but his eyes were widening.

As one, the pair turned to the wall just as it broke down and collapsed. The smaller pieces of debris were instantly sucked backwards and the larger pieces of soon followed it. Harsh winds whipped at Harry's hair as he gaped at the spectacle before him. The Word, which had

been no bigger than his fist, had grown to be the size of a car. Winds swirled around it, the very air being sucked into the deep-black spell as its powerful forces dragged in walls, floors and parts of the roof. Harry could see beyond it, where it had already torn down the wall to the courtyards.

A few of the guards were y trying to shoot at it, foolish but ultimately it was the only thing they could do. Suddenly, the guns of the guards nearest to it were sucked in. Harry could see them trying to retreat but the force wouldn't let them as slowly but surely they were sucked in. He turned his eyes away as the masked men and women began to scream as they were slowly ripped apart. Not even he wanted to see something like that.

"You," Tessa started as she wobbled on her feet. "Are either a genius or an idiot."

"...bit of...both..." Harry coughed. He lifted his wand. "Now...where...were we."

He lashed out with goutts of fire but it was immediately sucked into the hole. Tessa responded with her own lightning but it too was dragged away and consumed the moment it left her fingertips. Tessa growled as she took a few steps away from the spell even as the wall on the other side of the room began to crack. The floor was also being eaten away, forcing both Harry and Tessa to keep moving backwards as the hole grew larger and larger.

"It's...mass..." Harry growled out with a thick voice, ignoring the thick mucus and blood that dribbled from his mouth. "Smaller...lighter...go first...larger...go last."

"So I had gathered," Tessa said tightly. She sneered, her demeanour suddenly changing once again. "Why does this not surprise me? Pathetic little boys playing with forces they cannot comprehend!"

Harry said nothing but, knowing his spells weren't working and wanting to seize what opportunity he could out of this, stepped forward, fighting against the winds and the pull, raised his arm and punched Tessa in the face. Tessa shrieked and staggered, taking

wavering steps towards the black hole as she lost her focus. She glared at him as he smirked.

“Bastard!” she snapped. Suddenly, she grinned. “I like that in a guy.”

“This isn’t a fucking game!” Harry roared out thickly.

“Everything is a fucking game!” Tessa roared back, a maniac smile on her face. “Everything!”

She leapt forward, her hand drawing back. Her fingers glinted and Harry threw his head back as her suddenly-elongated nails scratched at him. His already sore throat let out a disgusting squelching noise as her nails slit his throat right above the Adam’s apple, Hellfire engulfed him once more as Meciél began to immediately heal the wound as Harry held his breath. His wings shot out and stabbed at her but she whirled around him in an amazing display of dexterity and gymnastics and flicked him in the chest with her finger.

The moment the tip of her finger touched him, Harry felt a blinding pain as her nail lengthened and pierced through him. He growled and raised a hand, raw Hellfire flaring up in a burst of unholy flame. Tessa widened and she leaped back as Harry hurled it at her. It came within centimetres of her head before it was inevitably tugged in and sucked into the hole. Harry surged forward, his wings lashing out in a combo of stabs and thrusts. Tessa dodged them all but Harry grabbed her wrists as she once again tried to impale him with her nails. She slipped out of them, but Harry grabbed them once again and then shoved his wings forward, stabbing her in the hands and nailing them to the wall.

Harry let a vicious grin cross his face as he reached for Tessa’s throat. Tessa thrashed her hands, tearing her skin and flesh in an attempt to get them free, but it was to no avail. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, Tessa leaned forward and locked her lips to Harry’s. Harry paused for a split-second as her tongue probed his, tingles of pleasure shooting down his adrenaline and hellfire-rushed body, before he brought his wings back and swiped them in front of his head.

Tessa leaned back at the last moment but several strands of her elongated hair fell to the ground, sharpened spears that would have killed Harry had he been distracted a second later. Harry went for her hands again but she reared her head back and head butted him square in the nose. Harry grunted and staggered back, lashing out at her with a fierce kick, but he almost immediately lost balance and hastily put his foot back down on the ground. Tessa smirked and raised her hand, her index and middle fingers pressed together. Two nails became one as they merged and shot at Harry with incredibly speeds, growing metres in length and stabbing past him and into the wall behind him. Harry's wing came up and the nail shattered but it didn't seem to affect Tessa as she lowered her hand and took another unsteady step backwards.

During their melee, the two of them had been steadily retreating from the hole as the manor crumbled away from them. Harry had to guess that it had already consumed a quarter of the once-beautiful house. Clearly, his Word had gone out of control. It was a new one, he had to admit, but in his practise it clearly hadn't reacted like this. Perhaps it was the banishing charm? Maybe it was the fire and lightning? He didn't know.

"Harry!" Tessa shouted over the din of rushing air and the loud cracking and splintering noises of the hole as it broke down the house. "This is fun!"

Harry took in her exhilarated grin and growled. He surveyed her carefully as they circled each other again, their feet shuffling along the ground as to keep them properly centred. If he wanted this to end quickly, he would need the Sword. His eyes scanned the room and to his horror he couldn't find it. He had had it in his hands...and then the floors collapsed...and Tessa knocked it out...and it fell...in the room all the way over there.

Harry's eyes were drawn to one of the crumbling rooms that were dozens of metres away. To his astonishment, the sword still lay there on the ground, surrounded by a circle of wood that somehow remained resistant to the pull of the hole. Still, it was out of Harry's reach for now and Tessa had a lot of tricks up her sleeve in hand-to-hand. He turned his head back to Tessa, only to find her literally

gaping at the hole and shaking her head. Harry frowned and turned back, only to still as shock flooded through him.

Maybe the forces were stronger on the other side of the hole or maybe the damn driver had left the pedal or whatever pressed down, but one of the tanks, the sixty-ton tanks, was slowly but surely being dragged across the driveway and towards the hole.

“What?” Harry exclaimed in disbelief. His voice was unheard over the wind. His face scrunched up and he looked absolutely baffled. “What?”

The tank hit the end of the driveway, where the rest of the driveway had broken away, and fell into the large pit. Even with the entire din around them, Harry felt the ground shudder and both he and Tessa watched with wide eyes as the tank slowly rose up the ground and was pulled to the large magical black hole- which was roughly the size of his apartment now. The turret swivelled madly as forces buckled at it and the tank flipped through the air.

Watching it, Harry could tell something was about to go wrong. Nevertheless, neither he nor Tessa anticipated the tank to actually shoot at them! The Denarian Knight flinched as the tank shell exploded right between Tessa and himself. The ground shuddered even more and he felt his feet losing their grip as the live tank round, embedded partly in the floor, lost its forward momentum and was sucked back towards the hole. Harry and Tessa soon joined it as the last of the floor crumbled beneath their feet...

A/N: Okay. This is the finale of the Denarian arc. One of the reasons why this particular fight had been built up so much was so that the reveal would be epic...but most people had already guessed it by the middle of Denarian Knight, so I suppose I should work on my mystery skills. I have 2000 words of Chapter 20 done at the time of posting, all Amanda for you fans out there, but I start uni again in a couple of days and there goes frequent updates again. I'll try to get some done on the side. Anyway, love or hate this set of chapters, here is it's end.

Both Harry and Tessa turned and tumbled as they were dragged by the sheer power of a Word of the World gone horribly wrong. Little pieces of debris zipped past them, Harry having to turn his head in a split-second as a piece of splintered wood threatened to impale itself into his head. Tessa's arms were tangled with his legs as the silver-haired Denarian scrabbled to get a grip on something- anything? Harry's lip curled and, even in face of present danger, unleashed his wings and swiped at her.

Tessa hissed at him, her gorgeous eyes filled with hatred as Harry's bony appendage sliced a deep gouge through her back. Her grip slackened and she abruptly let go. Harry saw her off with a vicious kick but had no time to feel satisfied as the black sphere in front of him continued to reel him in. He could see the tank closer to the sphere, its thick metallic armour cracking and crumpling under the powerful forces of the spell. The air howled as it too was sucked into the sphere, contributing to the solidified mass before him.

"Fuck!" Harry roared.

He had to stop, he had to stop soon! He wasn't a tank! He didn't have tons of thick, metal plated armour - the sphere would shatter his body before he even came close to where the tank was. His wings dragged uselessly in the air- he was flying and floating off the ground as even the dirt was sucked into the void he had summoned. His hands bounced off flying pieces of debris as he tried to grab a hold of something- anything. For a single moment, Harry stared at the sphere where true fear in his eyes.

Was he about to die here?

Then, his hand brushed cool metal and his fingers automatically closed around it. His arms flared with pain and his body was brought to an abrupt halt. His shoulder ached and his hands started to burn beneath his gloves. He forced his head up, fighting against the powerful winds driven on the force of the sphere, and saw his right hand gripping the Sword of the Cross- which remained immobile where it stood lodged into a tiny patch of unaffected dirt. Silver fire was creeping up the sword, burning his hand, but Harry gritted his teeth and held on, the rest of his body flopping uselessly.

He couldn't help it. Harry started chuckling out of sheer relief as his body flopped and bounced in the surging currents around him. Pieces of debris shot at him and his laughter ceased as he grunted painfully. Something large and painful had slammed into his back and his fingers involuntarily trembled, pain shooting up and down his arm. His brows furrowed in determination as the burning sensation in his hand became worse, until he could practically smell the flesh sizzling.

Suddenly and at the same time, the pain in his arm dulled while a low burning pain filled his body. Harry could only sigh in relief as he tightened his fingers around the sword and held on for his life.

'I tinkered with your nervous system and rerouted the pain so that your entire body would take on the load,' Meciell told him. 'Let us hope that this spell will soon end, for this could cause permanent neural damage if I continue for too long.'

Harry could only send his mental thanks. Then, from the corner of his eye, he saw a flash of silver. He turned his head and gaped as Tessa hovered only a few metres away from him, her hand outstretched as if grasping an invisible rope. Whatever she was doing to hold herself back, it wasn't working very well as she kept slipping closer and closer to the sphere. Their eyes met and Harry gave her a vicious grin.

"Fall, you bitch!" He called over the din.

There was no way that Tessa could have heard him but apparently she was proficient at reading lips. Harry wasn't too bad himself and that's why her retort, consisting of horrible things that Tessa wanted to do to his mother, made him laugh. Tessa slipped another inch, and then another, her legs dangling closer and closer to the sphere that threatened to suck up and destroy everything it could touch.

Light flashed in his vision and Harry blinked, shaking his head dazedly. He moved his eye from Tessa's slipping form to the sphere. The black surface, which Harry presumed was the broken up bits of stuff that the thing had sucked up and compressed, was cracking. Glowing white lines were appearing all over its solid surface as wind howled even fiercer. Harry's eyes widened as he recalled what the 'mini' version of the Word was supposed to do and shook his head in a gesture of futile denial.

"Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no," he muttered to himself.

The sphere continued to crack and crack as the forces that were pulling in the objects grew even fiercer and fiercer. Then, with one last major tug which almost pulled in Harry and sent a confused Tessa another few metres in, the forces abruptly stopped and there sphere hovered there motionless, looking like it was going to burst at the seams of white cracks. Harry's body flopped down, his hand still gripping the sword on the little patch of dirt the sphere hadn't claimed.

Ignoring the rush of dizziness and vertigo, Harry flicked his wrist- his wand coming down from his sleeve (where he had put it there the moment it looked like he might lose it) and he gripped it tightly. Power rushed through him, his bone wings came up and curled around him and defensive magic solidified into him, Harry pushing all of his power into this one shielding charm.

Then, the sphere exploded.

A wave of pure kinetic force rippled out from the sphere. Harry's shield flared and rippled madly- dirt and wood were thrown up in massive billowing clouds. He's hand clamoured for the sword, which suddenly became dislodged from the dirt. Harry didn't even have time to feel betrayed as he was sent soaring through the air at speeds that

were probably illegal for cars to drive at in most countries. Then, as he was flying, came the noise. It was absolutely deafening, as if all the clamour and noise of the past few minutes had been stored in at let out all at once. Harry's head exploded with pain and his entire body literally shook as the powerful shockwaves blanketed the area, literally crushing up some of the smaller flying objects into dust.

The debris and other stuff that had been circling the sphere as it was sucking it all in were pushed back with great force as well. Harry briefly caught sight of Tessa's silver hair before something came surging in between them- the mangled, half-crumpled remains of the battle tank. Harry's shield was flickering and shimmering as it deflected all kinds of smaller but still deadly debris but there was no way it could stop a tank! It surged to him, and then Harry was abruptly pulled away as the Sword of the Cross caught in a piece of flying debris that pulled him in the other direction. He was flying to the ruined remains of the manor, his vision was filling with bricks- and then everything went black.

Harry awoke to darkness, a shitload of pain and overwhelming pressure all over his body. He instinctively sneezed and then let out a strangled little gasp as his entire body flared up with unimaginable pain. There had only been a few times when he had felt worse than this, his fights with Voldemort, Nicodemus, Vesper, the Drakon- okay, perhaps it had been more than a few times, he mentally grumbled. He lay very still and took shallow breaths as he tried to ignore the crushing weight that pressed down on him. If it weren't for his wings, which were curled up around him protectively, he would be dead.

'That's what happens when a mansion falls on you,' Meciél's slightly-amused but mostly concerned voice mentioned. 'Be still. It's painful but I've already regenerated your fatal wounds. You won't die here, Beloved.'

"H-how long?" Harry slurred out. His head was turned awkwardly as the jagged edge of stone had gotten through the large holes in his wings- they were bone after all, not flesh- and was pressed on his cheek.

'It's only been about ten minutes,' Meciél answered. Harry could feel her emotions as clear as they were his own- she was excited and anxious and nervous in a way that he couldn't quite comprehend for himself, only identify and label. 'I haven't heard anything from Tessa yet.'

'With any luck, she's dead and this is all over.' Harry conversed within his head rather than out loud as the stone point began to cut into his cheek and draw blood.

'Hopefully,' Meciél agreed and Harry felt her vicious satisfaction at the thought. 'I will admit that that wasn't quite what I was expecting when we utilised that Word.'

'Not a clue, Meciél.' Harry sighed.

After a few more minutes, Meciél deemed Harry healthy enough to start trying to shift some of the rubble off himself. He managed to push the stone off his head somewhat as his wings strained against the immense load pressed against him. He cocked his head and placed an ear on the rubble around him. Then, concentrating carefully, he kicked out as best he could with his feet and allowed Meciél to listen to the vibrations around him. He repeated a few times and Meciél hummed.

'It should be safe,' she informed him.

Placing his one free hand on the rubble before him, Harry concentrated and allowed a steady trickle of Hellfire to build up. Raw power flowed through him, washing away some of his aches, and a fiery glow emanated in the trapped enclosure. Harry waited for a few moments and then slammed his fiery palm down on the rubble above him while, at the same time, heaving up with his wings. The rubble shuddered and exploded upwards with the force of a cannon as Harry pushed it all away, revealing the night sky and a glowing half-moon above him.

"That was...shit!"

One of the pieces of rubble was falling back onto him. He furiously channelled Hellfire into his hand and shot up with his wings- but large piece of rock never came as another piece of rubble slammed into the ground and something shot up into the air. The Sword of the Cross sliced through a thick patch of dead electrical cabling, which allowed a cracked light switch to fall, which sent a rock the size of Harry's head tumbling down the rocky and uneven slopes around him, which sent another piece of debris for Harry's head, which was careened away as the Sword of the Cross slammed into the ground right next to Harry and crashed into a large patch of broken bricks- which fell onto a raised end of a plank of wood that sent hefty rock at the other end soaring in the air to crash into the falling stone. Both pieces of rubble bounced harmlessly to the side as Harry gave the Sword an annoyed glare.

"So, you could save me from a vacuum cleaner spell of doom and a falling rock but you couldn't stop me from getting buried under a pile of rocks?" he deadpanned tiredly.

The sword glinted under the moonlight but Harry got the impression that it, if it could, it would be preening itself. How the hell an inanimate object, even holy objects, could develop emotions was beyond Harry but he growled and used the Sword to push himself up off the ground.

"Holy shit!" Harry whistled slowly as he took in the devastation around him.

He'd never been to a real muggle warzone but, if he had to guess, he'd say that the manor looked like it had just been bombed- repeatedly. The large and deep crater from where the sphere had been conjured only added legitimacy to the metaphor. The manor was in ruins, some sections standing while others were literally crumbling all around him. Water sprayed out from some broken underwater pipes and there was absolutely no sign of the guards or any of the other Denarians.

A sudden thought occurred to him and he winced.

"I really, really hope that the Aurors don't pop in," he muttered. "Add Voldemort too- and the White Council...and pretty much anybody."

He began to pat his torn, ragged clothes. When he failed to find his wand, his patting became more frantic as he started to look around him. With all of the recent magic that lingered in the air, it would be almost impossible to find the bloody thing amidst all this rubble. Harry growled and kicked at the ground, furious. A single pebble flew up from his kick and clanged as it struck the sword, which slowly toppled to the ground. The movement upset a small pile of broken bits of tiles and they fell away, revealing his wand- a little dusty but perfectly alright.

“Okay,” Harry declared flatly as he summoned his wand to his hand with a single flick of his wrist. “That’s starting to get a little annoying, although it is pretty cool.”

He picked up the sword and slung it over his shoulder. The ‘Luck of God’ was starting show its usefulness more so than usual. He wondered if the real reason the sword was knocked out of his hands earlier in the fight was solely so it could get into a position where he’d be able to grab it when he was getting sucked in. It was hard thinking like that, Harry thought with a scowl, because it got confusing as to where free will began and divine intervention ended.

“So, now what?” Harry asked out loud as he gazed upon the ruined manor and the heaps of rubble. “Do I search for her body?”

‘I want her coin,’ Meciell demanded. ‘I want all of their coins, but her coin especially.’

“Alright, alright,” Harry placated with an annoyed sigh. “Man, digging through piles of rocks was not what I wanted to do tonight.”

He levelled his wand at the nearest pile and blasted it away with a quick flick. To his absolute surprise, there was a body underneath it and Harry approached the somehow intact corpse of Verrine, her coin glinting between clasped fingers. Harry eyed the hilt of his sword on his shoulder.

“Really?” He queried with a scowl.

Suddenly, an exuberant yell echoed around the battle zone and Harry stiffened. He automatically took two steps backwards and whirled around. It was clearly feminine in nature and Harry growled as he recognised Tessa's voice. He crept through the piles of rubble, peering into the darkness in an attempt to find the other Denarian and promptly kill her.

The blast of lightning that exploded by his feet quickly dissuaded him into moving any closer. He sidled backwards as Tessa popped her head up from behind a particularly large pile of rubble. Her head was matted, her skin was paled and coloured with large, vicious bruises and her ear seemed to have been lopped off.

"That was...that was..." Tessa trailed off as pile of rubble exploded from around her and looked put-out as she gracefully dodged the killing curse. "Trying to kill me already? That's not nice!"

Harry blinked at her appearance. The circumstances hadn't been as kind to her clothes and it seemed like all she was wearing was her wide grin, the tattered remains of a shirt that really only covered her shoulders and nothing else and some black, lacy underwear. Essentially, Tessa was nude and didn't seem at all bothered by it.

Finishing his appraisal, Harry casually tilted his head back as a couple of sharpened hairs whizzed past and impaled themselves in a rock behind him. Tessa didn't look apologetic as she flipped her hair over her shoulders.

"I have never seen anything like that for as long as I have lived," Tessa exclaimed.

"Either have I," Harry admitted grudgingly.

Tessa gave him a critical once-over.

"Wow," she remarked. "You really kicked your own arse back there."

The air cracked and lightning and fired crashed against each other, the two Denarians probing each other's defences. Harry was reluctant to use a Word again at the moment, given what had just

happened, while Tessa didn't seem to have lost any of her lightning-manipulation abilities.

"I mean, adding Soulfire to that exotic spell? Just...wow," Tessa continued, ducking as Harry threw a stone the size of her head at him. She retaliated in a similar way and Harry brushed off the heavy stone with a casual swipe of his wand.

"Soulfire?" Harry frowned.

"You know, opposite to Hellfire," Tessa explained. "Angel magic."

Harry didn't say a word but his eyes flickered to the sword. Now that he thought about it, he was pretty sure some of the silvery power had floated to the Word when he was creating it. Was it that the Sword was the whole reason everything had gone shitfaced?

Tessa seemed to have grasped onto the situation and grinned. "You know," she said. "You almost died there as well. If you had, do you really think the Big Guy would have given a damn? Maybe He wanted to take us both out at the same time- get rid of us Denarians once and for all."

It was a pretty good strategy, Harry had to admit, and he wasn't naive enough to think it wasn't possible.

"Well, I'm still alive, aren't I?" Harry retorted. "Avada Kedavra!"

"It must sting, though," Tessa continued. "What's-His-Face meddling in your fights, as if you couldn't win by yourself."

"Where are you going with this?" Harry asked as they both ducked behind pieces of rubble. He silently shifted and wasn't surprised when the ground where he had been standing was struck with a searing bolt of lightning a few moments later. "Are you trying to goad me or...what?"

"Well, I was leading up to an offer of peace, an alliance and all that," Tessa admitted. "But, I think you would say no."

"After all of this?" Harry snorted. "I'm way too pissed off to even think of that."

"It was your fault!" Tessa protested.

"Tell that to my aching back," Harry muttered.

"So your back is aching," Tessa said after a moment's pause. It was hard to pinpoint her location as her voice bounced off piles of bricks, plaster and mortar. "Good. You have a weakness."

"What...wait...you can't really think..." Harry trailed off. "You know what? Fuck it."

"Don't worry, Harry," Tessa said with a giggle and her tone took on a dangerously seductive edge. "As a consolation prize, I'll definitely make sure to have fun with your corpse after I kill you- and by fun, I mean sexual things and by corpse, I mean dead body!"

Harry's position was suddenly filled with chaotic power as lightning surged from the heaps of rubble, capturing him in a field of power. His limbs jerked up and down and the sword fell uselessly from his back, hitting the ground silently. Tessa emerged, a victorious smirk on her face but she paused as Harry straightened and turned his head as if unaffected by her power.

"Fooled you!" he gloated and disappeared in the shimmering telltale of an illusion.

Fiendfyre raced down her position and the entire area exploded with cursed fire, lightning up the night sky as it began to devour the rocks and concrete around it. In the middle of this was Tessa, who looked amused.

"Fooled you too, darling!" she called out.

A second Harry, standing a little further back with his wand out, widened his eyes as his head spun around. A moment later, stacks of heavy rocks and debris toppled onto him and he disappeared. Tessa brought her hands together and lightning bulged from the cracks,

sizzling currents of power surging through the heap. The stones began to glow and crack under the heat and some fell apart, revealing Harry's unaffected face.

Tessa's looked startled and yelped as the real Harry sprung from the shadows without a word and swiped at her with the sword. Silver fire met her crackling electricity, negated it and sliced a thin line down her chest. Tessa threw bolt after bolt of lightning at her surroundings and the ruined manor groaned as one of the concrete stumps was destroyed. A blackened and crack room slowly toppled over, succumbing to gravity at last, and Harry had to jump back as it collapsed in a pile of plaster and floorboards.

"Well done!" Tessa called out from the other side of the rubble. "Well played, too."

Harry spat and gripped the sword tightly. He shouldered it once again and gestured at the pile of rubble in front of him with a grim expression. A single spell was all it took and the debris bulged, a sapphire blast of light sending it exploding outwards and raining deadly shards of shrapnel down on the ground. With it out of the way, Harry was just in time to see Tessa using both hands to somehow lift the twisted and crumbled remains of the tank and throw it at him.

"Fuck!" Harry hissed. He took a step back, twirled on his feet and disappeared as quickly as he could- just a split second before the tank came crashing down on his position.

He reappeared fifty metres to his right and felt both the massive vibrations that shot through the ground and a strange numbness in his left hand. He glanced down and saw that two of his fingers were just...gone.

"Accio splinched fingers!" Harry muttered to himself and gestured his wand in the general direction. Thin streams of paste and blood flew towards him, nothing recognisable as an appendage though.

'Better a few splinched and replaceable fingers than a tank landing on your head,' Meciell added wisely.

Loud footsteps belted over the rubble as three armed men, all looking worse for wear, stormed over. Harry couldn't see past their masks as he levelled his wand at them. Three flashes of silver light saw them go down with large, bloody chunks missing from their bodies. Rubble shifted and Harry quickly swished his wand, manipulating the fallen machine guns and directing them forward as Tessa strolled out, her silver eyes alert.

Those eyes quickly widened and she threw out her hands in a flash as Harry used his wand to fire the guns. Gunfire roared in the ruins around them but the bullets pinged and ricocheted off a sheen, almost invisible field around Tessa.

"Electromagnetic fields," Tessa smirked as Harry let the guns drop uselessly to the ground. "I'd developed them before Benjamin Franklin had even had his first lay."

"And that's how you survived the Word," Harry muttered, mostly to himself. "Pulling yourself towards something- very impressive."

His retort was also accompanied by a blast of Hellfire-enriched magic which shattered through the Tessa's shield. The Denarian sorceress ducked a little awkwardly and her hands crackled with electricity. Harry tensed but blinked in surprise as the magic died away.

"Why are we fighting?"

"Why aren't we fighting" Harry retorted.

"We don't have to be enemies," Tessa continued and Harry cocked his head. He regarded her as she stood there for a few moments, his eyes narrowed speculatively. Then, as he spotted it, a large, savage grin crossed his face.

"Oh, this is good," he said with a chuckle. "This is the 'talk-while-I'm-hurt' bit, isn't it?"

"What?"

“Your hand,” Harry pointed out. Tessa’s face twitched as Harry gestured at the hand which had just let the electricity fade away. “It’s twitching. Nerve damage, probably. You didn’t drop the spell, you just couldn’t use it.”

Tessa was silent.

“You may look alright but your regeneration isn’t as powerful as mine,” Harry continued. “You’re weak now.”

He summoned a wave of fire and threw it at Tessa, who cursed out loud and ducked back into the shadows amongst the large piles of rubble. The flames illuminated the sky as Harry turned his head, searching for Tessa anxiously.

“Why do you ‘really really’ wanna kill me?” Tessa’s voice bounced out from the shadows, and it suddenly sounded so tired. “We’ve never met. I’ve never had any association with you? Why go to all this effort?”

“You pissed of Mec-“

“No!” Tessa snapped. One of the piles of rubbles exploded under the force of a purple light and Tessa waited until the booming explosion had died away. Harry frowned lifted his wand. “Why do you wanna kill me? Do you just live to serve her?”

“Well, when you say it like that it sounds really gay,” Harry remarked. “But yeah, pretty much.”

A silent echosoundra bounced off the rubbles as the echolocation spell brought back thousands of sketchy lines and corners of the surroundings. Harry frowned when he failed to find the soft-curved nature of a human body. He needed to find out an infrared vision charm or something, and if it didn’t exist then he needed to make one. It would have made this fight quite a bit easier.

“Wow,” Tessa remarked, oblivious to his actions. “You’re even more pathetic than I...” she broke away with a round of hacking coughs and Harry smiled.

"Fuck you, Tessa. Who's really the pathetic one here?" Harry called out. He focussed, exploding another pile of rubble and then, as quietly as he could, disappeared and reappeared several metres to his right- just in case.

"You could fuck me if you wanted," Tessa agreed and a lilting edge entered her voice. "I'd probably a better lay than Meciel."

Harry's face twitched. Tessa abruptly laughed and Harry quickly realised that she must have seen his expression. He disappeared and reappeared several dozen metres upwards, perched on a large, ruin concrete stub that arose amidst all of the other rubble. Fuck! Where the hell was she?

"You haven't fucked her yet, have you?" Tessa crowed and giggled maniacally. "That's rich! How the hell are you so pussy whipped without the pussy?"

"I'm going to use a word that'll sum up why it's none of your business," Harry growled, absently setting the Sword aside- just in case. He opened his mouth, focussed his mind and as one, he and Meciel let loose a Word that reverberated through the air.

The rubble-filled ruins stilled for a moment, as if the word itself were gathering everything up for them. Then, they boomed out as if Harry had roared them through a sonorous charm. Small pieces of debris and the lingering flames of his spells were crushed and put out by their mere sound. A golden light sizzled through the air, blasting aside and reducing large piles of twisted wreckage into dust. Harry grinned even as blood dribbled from his torn throat as the dust from his Word cleared. Most of the ruins around him had been reduced to dust. Standing in the middle of them, looking even more battered than usual, was Tessa. Her smirk was gone and she was panting weakly.

"So this is Meciel's revenge," Tessa mused quietly, her eyes flickering up to Harry. She made no attempt to move and attack him as blood trickled from his mouth. "This is our punishment for our 'sins'." She chuckled. "Who ever knew that Meciel was a family girl?"

Harry stilled. Tessa noticed.

“Oh,” she breathed softly. “You don’t know, do you?”

She must have found that ironically funny as she broke out into a large wave of laughter even as she collapsed to her knees. She was bleeding quite severely and was covered in dust, her delectable naked form grimy and dirtied from his latest spell.

“You...oh, your poor little boy,” Tessa cooed cruelly. “Do you really think you can live up to the likes of what Meciél lost? Do you really think you can replace her great grandchildren?”

At that, Meciél went very still in Harry’s brain. Harry’s unspoken queries to her were met with absolute silence and he inwardly frowned.

“Before you kill me,” started Tessa with a wide grin on her face. “Let me tell you why Meciél wants us dead!”

Harry kept his wand trained at her but hesitated. Tessa must have taken that as a sign to continue as she smiled weakly and continued.

“Back in the good ol’ days, Meciél was the boss and we didn’t like it very much,” Tessa said, her eyes staring absently into something into the distance. “True, the Order was effective but it was also- limited. Meciél had set boundaries that we couldn’t cross, even if it meant we lost power. She was also a cruel bitch, much nastier than Nicodemus ever was. In a long and intriguing tale of mystery and discovery, we eventually ended up finding the cause for all of our problems.”

Tessa smiled and her teeth glinted in the dark.

“Her family,” Tessa continued. “Her mortal descendents, the very few- if the only- lot with angel blood in their ancestry. I don’t know how her ancestor survived the purge.”

Harry started, his eyes wide.

Naturally, we went out and killed them. It'd be better for her if she wasn't so hung up on some little nobodies. Long story short, Meciël found out and reacted much how you have now. She devastated the Order, conspired with the Knights of the Cross to see us all dead and our coins locked away and almost succeeded too. Nicodemus led a revolt with some of the few remaining Denarians, including myself, Rosanna and Namshiel, and we overthrew the fucking bitch."

"What a...lovely story," Harry remarked, his throat still a little scratchy. There was no visible indication of how he was feeling on his face. "Is there a point?"

"You're just like all of Meciël's other hosts," Tessa breathed. "You're a nothing to her. No host has ever matched up to what she lost. She may grow to like them, but she'll never love them!" she spat out.

"In the end," she continued triumphantly. "She will dispose of you- or, better yet, she'll make you dispose of yourself so that she remains safe. Tell me, how do you think her last host died?"

Harry remembered that day like it was yesterday, the horrible screaming and the panicked rush that eventually led him to find the coin in the first place. In his mind, Meciël was silent, not allowing him to feel anything from her but allowing Tessa to continue talking.

"Nicodemus and I were hunting Meciël a few years back. We caught up with her host, who sacrificed his life so that Meciël's coin could remain safe. Without her abilities, he died like a little bitch! So will you one day!"

Harry stared at Tessa blankly and then, to her shock, began to chuckle.

"Is that all you've got?" He questioned, still chuckling. "Is that it? Tessa, I'm not an idiot."

Tessa stilled.

"I know that Meciël was banished from Heaven or whatever because she walked into a house, found something she didn't like, picked a

fight with two angels and probably killed them,” Harry recited. “Logic says, she had somebody she loved in there. To hear that she had mortal descendents isn’t that surprising- I’d guessed it was something like that long before I’d even heard of you.”

“You...”

“And so what?” Harry continued. “You’re expecting me to switch sides because Meciël consorted with the Knights?” He gestured at the blade by his feet. “Hellooooo? I’m a freaking Knight. I can’t complain.”

“She’ll betray you,”

“Maybe,” Harry conceded. “But I know Meciël and I know myself. I don’t think she will. I think she does love me. If I’m wrong, fine, but I’ll take my ignorance any day.”

“You idiot,” Tessa breathed. Power surged around her, Harry stiffened and the ground around Tessa exploded as a pair of lightning bolts literally exploded from her feet. Harry saw a flash of bloodied stumps before Tessa soared through the air towards him. A hand snaked forward, gripping his tattered clothes while power built up in her other hand.

“I’ll take you with me!” she growled.

Lightning roared, the sky turned white and pain enveloped Harry’s chest as Tessa channelled a huge amount of power into her final spell. Tessa screamed in agony- the effort must have been hurting or killing her- but she kept it up, her own Hellfire roaring into the curse in an attempt to tear Harry asunder. When the light died down, Tessa’s eyes widened. Harry’s chest had been partially ripped over but his bone wing had blocked most of the blow. A second later, she stiffened and her lips parted in surprise. She tried to say something but a red mist billowed out of her mouth and onto Harry’s face.

“For a little girl like you, this was a surprisingly pain in the arse,” Harry remarked casually as Tessa’s body slumped against his, the life already beginning to leave it.

“Ah...well,” Tessa breathed softly. “It was fun.”

“What was?”

“Everything.”

“Do you know what else is fun?” Harry asked her quietly, letting go of the Sword of the Cross impaled into her stomach and jabbing his wand in the middle of her breasts. “Fire.”

Fiendfyre roared and Harry caught one last look of Tessa’s slackened face before she was blasted back, enveloped and consumed by Fiendfyre so hot that it was almost white. The Fiendfyre died down a moment later as Harry flicked his wand and a blackened heap fell to the ground, settling into the dust with a loud thump.

It was over.

The Order of the Blackened Denarius had fallen.

Harry grumbled as he used his wand to sift through the rubble in search of the little silver coins. Most of the Denarians had been killed when they’d been caught in the Nevernever portal trap, which meant their coins had been in the manor when the Word had sucked it all up and spat it out again. There was no force in the world that could destroy the coins, so they had to be around the area in the rubble somewhere. It was actually surprising about how many he had found so far- eight and counting, but he blamed it on the Sword of the Cross as it lay across his back, dormant once more.

‘Your wound is mostly healed,’ Meciell told him quietly and Harry looked down.

Tessa’s final death curse, if you could call it that, had almost laid a ripper on him. It was only that his reflexes were better than hers- and that he really hadn’t been expecting her to blow off her own feet just to get close to him- that saw him come off with nothing more than a nasty scar, which...Harry blinked and boggled at it.

‘It will fade in time,’ Meciell assured him.

“No, it’s not that,” Harry murmured. He gently traced over the scar, which zigzagged across his chest in a large lightning-bolt pattern. “I’m just thinking of the irony of having another lightning-bolt scar.”

Meciel hummed in his mind.

“So,” Harry continued as he went back to work. “A family huh?”

‘Indeed.’

“Did I pass your little loyalty test? I assume that that was what it was,” Harry questioned a tad testily and he felt Meciel...grimace, for lack of a better word.

‘I saw no need to bring it up,’ Meciel answered and she sounded distinctively uncomfortable. ‘They are gone. I am here with you. That is all there is to it.’

Harry nodded and was quiet as he carefully levitated a pile of rubble out of the way. He had a hunch that there would be a coin down there and sure enough, he bent down and slipped another silver denarius into a little zip-up bag.

“Any of your family still alive?” he asked.

‘I don’t think so,’ Meciel replied. ‘At the very least, I can’t be sure.’

“You’re not going to abandon me like she said?”

‘No,’ came Meciel’s firm and resounding answer.

“Cool,” Harry remarked with a nod.

He reached the blackened corpse of Tessa, could only be described as a hunk of blackened, scorched meat with no identifiable features and bent down to pick up her coin. He thumbed it and frowned.

"It's a pity," he remarked. "I liked her and I'll never meet her again. She was the host and this is the Fallen. It's just like you and I, Meciél, are two very different people."

He placed the coin in the bag and stood up again. Verrine's corpse was nearby and he approached it silently. Glancing down at the body with an undecipherable emotion, he frowned again.

"As for Verrine, I suppose I could meet her again," he mused.

He picked up her coin and eyed it carefully for a few minutes. He had no doubts as to Verrine's true intentions but she had been loyal-sort of. That in itself required at least a little bit of consideration. He sighed and put it in his other pocket.

"I'll think on it later," he decided. He turned back to the rubble. "Well," he exclaimed with false-cheer. "Ten down, who knows how many more left? Man, I should have asked the Knights how many they had."

The sword on his back glinted with silvery soulfire for one last time before the steel dulled and became still. Although Harry didn't know it at the time, it would be the last time he wielded it ever again.

A/N: Yo. Here's chapter 20. It's a little bit shorter than the last few chapters but still tops the average chapter length- around 5k words. As some may know, this is the start of the arc that I've been wanting to write since the middle of Denarian Renegade. I'll try to get something up soon, but uni is back and I have a ton of assignments and work due. Hope you like it.

Christmas at Hogwarts, Amanda had decided, was bittersweet. On the one hand, the castle practically glowed with festive cheer as Professor Flitwick, the designated Christmas-spirit-upper-guy, bounced around the castle with his handy wand, waving and swishing and twirling and conjuring up some awe-inspiring decorations. Dumbledore's eyes would twinkle, Snape would become just a tad softer, McGonagall would loosen up to the point where she would burst out in laughter over a mug of mead and the castle would just...hum...with happiness.

On the other hand, spending Christmas at Hogwarts meant not seeing her family for yet another few months. On some of her particular nostalgic days, she missed the old days where life as much, much simpler. The danger had still been there, perhaps, but she had been ignorant of it and, as they say, ignorance was bliss. Then, she remembered the circumstances of the past couple of years and her determination returned two-fold. One day, she thought privately to herself, her name would be known amongst the ranks of Albus Dumbledore and Godric Gryffindor and Harry Potter.

Just thinking about Harry brought a warm glow to Amanda's chest. Her heart felt like it would explode from the massive amounts of feelings that surged through it. The beaming smile that had appeared on her face a few days ago after getting a letter from her father had stayed there. She patted her robes, feeling for the crumpled piece of paper in her pocket. She would keep this, she had decided, as a memento to the day when her life became better- a memento of the day when the Blackened Order of Denarius had been destroyed.

She didn't know the details, but apparently a few days ago, and from out of the blue, Harry had showed up to her house, dumped a bag of denarius coins on the kitchen table, told her daddy to 'look the hell after them' and left. Daddy had opened the bag to find over twenty

little silver coins in there, the last remnants of the fading organisation that was the Blackened Order. Daddy had told her that there were still some lone coins out there but the heads and thinkers of the Order had been captured. Amanda didn't know how he had done it. She didn't know how he had destroyed the same Order that had butchered millions of people since its inception thousands of years ago.

But, she wasn't surprised that he had.

She felt like crowing right there and then as she waited in the classroom- which, again, was coincidentally abandoned- for Harry to show up. She knew it! Apart from getting those murderous sociopathic bastards off her family's back, Harry had done something else when he had destroyed his Denarian kin. He had proven her indisputably right.

Harry Potter was a good person.

Maybe he wasn't a nice person. Maybe he wasn't a pleasant person. But there was no denying it now-Harry was a good person. Or, rather, he wasn't an evil person. Amanda's smile faded as she remembered her encounter with true evil. Nicodemus had been hideous, and not in his physical looks. It was the...aura...around him. When she had met him, Amanda had felt malice seep out of every pore of his skin and could literally feel his evilness brushing up against her. The cold-feeling and polite demeanour of his didn't fool her for a bit. She could feel every little thing that was wrong with him. During that meeting, the split-second before Nicodemus had casually driven a sword through her gut with the air of somebody swatting a fly, Amanda knew true terror. It still gave her nightmares sometimes.

It was why, when Harry boastfully claimed that he was evil in his somewhat-cute arseholish way of his, Amanda just giggled and shook her head. The feelings she got from Harry were rough and chaotic but never that evil. Plus, he was just so fun to tease, even if it always ended up with her blushing and Harry smirking. Harry couldn't fool her, not when Amanda could stand by his side and feel like everything was alright in the world.

So maybe she had a little crush on the boy who saved her life? Who cared? Apart from daddy, of course- and mom, and Molly and Daniel and Alicia and Matthew and Hope and little Harry and Hermione and- well, who cared what they thought anyway?

The irritation Amanda was feeling as she recalled a recent lecture by her brothers, who seemed to be convinced that Harry was the spawn of Satan, broke her out of her reverie and she shook her head in frustration, her blond locks swishing gently over her back.

“C’mon, Harry!” she whined out loud, glaring at the door. “You’re laaaaaaaate.”

After a few more minutes of waiting, Amanda sighed and stood up. As long as she was sitting there waiting for Harry to come she might as well get back to practise. She reached into her bag on the table and pulled out a couple of spheres. They were roughly the size of the tennis ball, zoomed around in the air and shot golden sparks at her that were surprisingly painful on her bare skin. Harry had given her ten of them in his last visit and told her practise with them. She had started off with one, then two, then three and then moved on to her last four. There were two left from that batch, something that she was very proud off.

“Okay,” Amanda called out cheerfully, shrugging off her jumper and shaking her arms and legs.

She tentatively reached out and, as quick as she could, tapped both spheres with her wand. Then, she jumped back and instinctively sidestepped as both spheres whirled to life, shot up into the air and zapped a pair of sparks at her. Amanda waved her wand in a series of quick flicks and conjured a gust of wind, hurling up a chair and throwing it at the clustered spheres all in one go.

The spheres dodged and Amanda couldn’t suppress her smile as one of them looped to her left and the other to her right- moving exactly where she would have gone. A loud crack filled the room, akin to the backfire of a car, and the sphere barely dodged Amanda’s almost-perfected effodio curse. The silver flash of light smashed upon a table

and shattered it, while Amanda ducked and weaved a series of zaps with almost casual ease.

When Harry had first given her the things, he had given her a list of rules that she had to abide by. The first one was that she was not to use a shielding charm of any sort. After his complimentary leers and comments about her breasts, he had mentioned that her body was lithe enough to comfortably dodge and weave around the sparks without losing momentum. He had only admitted it grudgingly and had trounced her in their duel later on, telling her that he didn't want her to get a big head. Amanda had resisted the 'pot, kettle, black' and had thrown herself diligently in her training. It was one of the reasons why she had stayed at Hogwarts for Christmas. She had had every intention of going home but it wasn't until she was waving the train goodbye that she realised she wasn't on it.

Amanda absently ducked a zap from one of the floating spheres and responded with conjured fire and a screamed incantation. It wasn't as bright and full as some of the stuff she had seen Harry do but it did the job as the sphere swung into the fiery blaze, its momentum too strong for it to slow down in time.

That was another thing she had gotten somewhat better at- predicting movement and adjusting naturally.

"Good afternoon, Ms Carpenter."

Amanda shrieked and spun around, her greyish eyes widening as surprise flooded through her. A second later, she shrieked again as the last sphere got a good zap on her butt. She was about to deactivate the annoying little thing when it abruptly fell to the ground. Amanda turned back to the intruder and smiled shakily.

"Merry Christmas, Professor Dumbledore," she greeted awkwardly. "Um...about this..."

"Have no fear," Professor Dumbledore said with a chuckle. . "I have been aware of your activities here for quite some time. Rest assured, Ms Carpenter. You are not in trouble."

Amanda breathed a sigh of relief but had to stare at his choice of clothing. He had traded in his majestic purple and silver robes for something that looked like it like an overgrown plant. His dark-green robes looked quite bizarre, covered in little bits of silver, gold and crimson glowing dots. They flared around his ankles and Amanda cocked her head, feeling the urge to squint her eyes.

“Have you dressed up as a Christmas tree?” Amanda wondered out loud, her curiosity overriding her politeness. “And why is your nose red?”

“It’s all about the spirit, my dear.” Dumbledore chuckled deeply. He smoothed over his beard. “It’s all about the spirit.”

Amanda suddenly remembered who she was talking to and blushed.

Dumbledore smiled down at her kindly, not taking offence at her rudeness. As Amanda apologised, his twinkling blue eyes glanced over the empty classroom. Amanda thought he might have lingered on the desk with the effodio curse spell damage but nothing showed on the Headmaster’s face as he casually strolled forward and stopped above the last deactivated sphere.

“I see you have put these to good use,” Dumbledore mentioned.

“Harry gave them to me,” Amanda supplied. She resisted the urge to lower her head as Dumbledore’s eyebrows shot up. “He said I needed help- lots and lots of help.” She muttered the last part feeling disgruntled.

“I see,” Dumbledore murmured and his eyes twinkled furiously. “So this is what he wanted to do with them. I thought it strange when he requested them from me.”

“What?” Amanda blurted. “They’re yours?”

“Certainly,” Dumbledore replied in a jolly tone. “These are formal Auror training tools. They were quite popular during the First Uprising of Lord Voldemort. If I recall, these were particularly popular when training in physical avoidance tactics.”

Dumbledore handed Amanda the sphere and she took it back.

“While I must say that I disapprove of my students preparing themselves for... well, we all know what is coming,” Dumbledore said quietly. “However, I must say that you have greatly improved in your stay here at Hogwarts. I have only met a few witches who were as adapt and talented as you were.”

Amanda’s cheeks went red but she wore a pleased smile as pleasure surged through her.

“Thank you,” she said humbly. “Still, I’m not as good as some other certain students.”

Dumbledore caught her meaning and chuckled.

“You will find that Harry Potter is a rare exception in many cases,” he said. “Although, he has also been quite pleased with your progress—or so I believe. He has mentioned your growing skills quite often during our meetings.

“He has?” Amanda asked with wide eyes.

“Indeed, my dear,” Dumbledore acknowledged and smiled at her softly.

Amanda wasn’t quite sure how that made her feel, it was somewhere between happy and ecstatic. Dumbledore coughed and Amanda blinked, glancing back up at the Headmaster and shaking her head to get her focus back.

“Incidentally,” Dumbledore continued with a frown. “I don’t suppose you have heard from Harry over the past couple of days or so, have you?”

“No, sir,” Amanda answered. She cocked her head. “Why? Haven’t you?”

“No,” Dumbledore answered. His tone was light but there was something in his eyes that made Amanda’s smile fade. “He was supposed to meet me this morning, before his session with you, but he failed to arrive. I was quite surprised- Harry has never missed a lesson before.”

“Maybe he’s off on holidays?” Amanda suggested after a pause, scrambling for an explanation. “Oh, did you hear?”

“I did indeed,” Dumbledore answered gravely. “Harry has struck a powerful blow for what is right in this world. I meant to pass on my congratulations...” Dumbledore trailed off and a kind smile appeared on his face. “Never mind. Perhaps I will send out Fawkes with a message. Thank you for your time, Ms. Carpenter. Have a joyful Christmas.”

“Er...Professor?” Amanda spoke up as Dumbledore turned to leave. “Can I...can I come with you?”

At Dumbledore’s inquisitive look, she hurried on.

“It’s just that...I want to yell at him for ditching me to go off and perv at girls in Tahiti or something.”

Dumbledore regarded her for a very long time, his eyes seemingly probing every facet of her being. Amanda felt like squirming under the Headmaster’s pensive blue gaze and was relieved when the wizened man gave her a gentle smile and nodded his head gracefully.

“Of course you can, Amanda,” the Headmaster said.

Amanda picked up on the use of her first name and suddenly felt like she had passed one of the Professor’s tests. Nevertheless, she beamed back at him happily and followed him out of the abandoned classroom.

Amanda felt like she was just as noticeable as one of the books on the shelf as Dumbledore paced in his office furiously. Frankly, she was a tad frightened of the Headmaster at the moment. His normally twinkling gaze had turned hard, somewhat like her father when he

became truly serious, and his body was tense, as if he were expecting a fight at any minute.

Professor Dumbledore's Phoenix had come back a few moments ago just after the Headmaster had sent out a letter for Harry. There had been some kind of communication between the bird and its master and Dumbledore had simply become one of the scariest people she had ever met as he exploded into action. Even now she felt like cowering in her seat as his anger rolled off him in palpable waves.

"Albus!"

Dumbledore turned his head sharply and strode to his desk, picking up a small mirror. Amanda noticed McGonagall slipping quietly into the room, her face severe, as Dumbledore gazed into the mirror expectantly.

"Sirius," he responded gravely.

"It's a mess here." Amanda vaguely recalled Sirius Black's voice. He was some kind of framed prisoner or something. She only really remembered him storming into the Department of Mysteries a few times and meeting him afterwards. 'Somebody tore this place up pretty badly. You were right, Albus. The wards were destroyed.'

"There's nobody there now?" Albus asked sharply.

"We don't think so. Moody is sweeping the perimeter while Tonks is asking his neighbours what they heard. All we know is that Harry is missing- and it didn't look like he went peacefully."

Amanda felt her heart stop and her lips parted in shock. For a moment, she struggled to breathe as she stared wide-eyed at the ornate silver mirror, unwilling to believe what she had just heard. Harry...was missing? Somebody had taken him?

"Harry!" She breathed in horror.

Professor McGonagall glanced at in quiet surprise, as if truly recognising Amanda's presence for the first time. Her lips pressed

against each other thinly and she radiated disapproval. She opened her mouth but Dumbledore shot her one sharp look and she stilled.

“Very well,” Dumbledore said grimly. “Despite the risks, I will be there shortly. I pray that I am wrong about this, Sirius.”

“We’ll see you soon.”

Amanda watched Dumbledore put down the mirror as her dismay only increased at the sudden slump Dumbledore’s body took. With a moment of startling realisation, Amanda realised that Professor Dumbledore looked...old...and he sounded scared.

“Shit!” Amanda hissed under her breath and she didn’t even care when Professor McGonagall glared at her.

Harry had gotten into a (obviously) fight with something that even Dumbledore was scared of. What had happened?

“Minerva. We must go,” Dumbledore ordered quietly, breaking the quiet silence in the room. Fawkes swooped down from the golden perch next to his desk and landed on his shoulder. He handed Professor McGonagall a scroll. “This will take you to your destination. I will meet you there.”

Professor McGonagall took the scroll as Dumbledore turned to Amanda, his expression grave. But, before the Headmaster could even open his mouth Amanda had butted in.

“I’m coming.”

“Ms Carpenter!” hissed Professor McGonagall, her face taut with stress.

Amanda didn’t even give her a second look as she glared at Dumbledore with a sudden anger that overtook her anxiety. There was no way she was going to stay back when Harry was in trouble! When he could be...

Dumbledore's eyes pierced through her as he bent down, regarding her carefully. After a few moments, his expression lightened. He straightened up and chuckled quietly to himself.

"Very well, Amanda," Dumbledore agreed softly. "Perhaps you could be helpful. Minerva, could you please escort Ms Carpenter here to the portkey destination."

"Albus, she's just a child..."

"A child whose bond with Harry far exceeds any of our own," Dumbledore interrupted. "Perhaps even my own. Please take her with you, Minerva."

Professor McGonagall sighed in defeat. That was all Dumbledore needed and Amanda jumped back in surprise as Dumbledore disappeared in a flash of fire and heat. She was used to Harry's fire-based spells but the feeling that came from this one was so...different. She continued to stare until Professor McGonagall coughed.

"Are you coming?" she asked tartly.

Amanda flushed but pushed back her embarrassment. Determination filled every pore of her being as she reached out and placed her hand on the scroll. With a sudden lurching sensation, Amanda was sucked from the Headmaster's office and disappeared with McGonagall.

The seedy apartment was nothing what Amanda had been expecting. From the way Harry went on about those bloody silk sheets of his, she had expected him to live in a grandiose home with butlers and maids- maids in skimpy clothing. A little rundown place with water-stained walls and a cracked roof, fresh plaster contrasting greatly with years of grim, wasn't what she had exactly pictured as his first choice in apartments. The apartment looked a little battered up as well. The furniture had been blasted apart or turned over, there were several large holes in the floor and walls and somebody- or something- had torn the fridge in half with long jagged edges that might have been caused by claws. That cause for that was made immediately clear as Dumbledore stepped aside and Amanda could peer past his Christmas coloured robes.

There were two dead things lying on the carpets in a puddle of their own blood. They were the size of a tiger or a lion, with long curved claws and a thick coat of brown and blood-stained fur.

Amanda stared at them wide-eyed, her nose wrinkling in disgust at the dead brutes. They kind of looked like something Hagrid might smuggle into the castle and raise in secrecy, but Amanda didn't even think that Hagrid would be that stupid. She stumbled back and had to clasp a hand over her nose as a wave of rotten meat hit her nose. For a few moments, nausea threatened to engulf her and she panicked, turning her head and preparing to heave.

Then, somebody rapped her across her head and Amanda was forced to exhale. Something trickled down her spine and she abruptly felt a little better. Amanda glanced up Mad-Eye Moody- the real one, she hoped- and gave him a shaky smile. The grizzled man merely grunted and stalked off, his wooden leg thumping hollowly against the wooden floorboards.

"W-What is that...thing?" she stuttered, pointing at the dead creature on the floor of Harry's apartment.

"I wish we knew," said somebody whose voice Amanda immediately recognised as Sirius Black. She glanced at him, noting his hollowed out features which might have been attractive at one point or another.

"There were more of them, Dumbledore," Sirius continued, glancing away. "The first body was found by the stairway- the muggles just walked past it without seeing a thing. It dissolved into a pile..."

The carcass in front of them was frothing at the lips and, under Amanda's astonished gaze, it literally bubbled away. Flesh, fur and blood all became a pile of translucent goo in less than a second. Amanda gaped while Dumbledore exhaled noisily.

"I see," he murmured. He appeared to be thinking fast, even pulling out an old-style pocket watch and glancing at it. "The seventh hour, on the dot."

"It means something to you?" Sirius looked surprised.

"What have the neighbours told you?" Dumbledore asked him sharply and the fugitive frowned, disliking the way that the Headmaster had ignored him.

"They heard a few thumps a few hours ago and that's about it," he answered hesitantly.

As the two men conversed, Amanda gazed around and couldn't stop the urge to brush her hands against the walls. So this was how Harry Potter lived. The man who had slew the Blackened Order lived in an apartment that she privately though would be better off for a druggie or something. The worry inside of her was building, even as she tried to hold it back. Harry was missing and there had been two dead magical things on the floor. What had happened here?

"Oh!" Amanda exclaimed in surprise as she completed her pacing of the living room.

Behind one of the couches, as if it had been thrown away in disgust, lay a sword that was oh-so-familiar to her. She had seen it before- it was a Sword of the Cross! Her worry was temporarily replaced by a sense of awe and amazement as she knelt down, cocking her head and eying the blade reverently. The sword seemed to gleam before her eyes and she couldn't help herself. Her quavering hand reached out, her fingers trembling just a few inches off the smooth metal surface of the hilt. She closed them around the hilt and grasped the sword in her hand.

She was a bit disappointed to see that nothing happened. She wasn't expecting herself to be a Knight or anything but couldn't there be a least a little silver fire? Then, a thought occurred to her and her dread returned.

"Professor Dumbledore?" she murmured and lifted up the sword. "Harry wouldn't have left this behind, would he? If he was in trouble, he would have grabbed it before running, right?"

Dumbledore eyed the sword in her hands and the glimmer of sadness behind his half-moon glasses was all the confirmation Amanda needed. She carefully lowered the sword and placed it on Harry's half-destroyed kitchen bench.

Hang on. What was that glimmer?

Amanda bent over at something that had caught her eye. On the floor of the tiny kitchen, amidst the wreckage of the ruined fridge, as something that suddenly seemed absolutely fascinating. Amanda felt her breath catch as a sense of awe and wonder came over her that made her fascination with the sword pale in comparison. What an interesting relic! It was a little silver coin, lying innocuously on the floor, but it was just so incredible!

Silver coin... silver coin... silver coin... these words reverberated in her mind and Amanda was yanked out of her stupor! A silver coin!

"Professor!" She called out in panic. "Professor!"

Dumbledore strode over the room to her as she backed away from the fridge, shaking off the seductive pull of the coin. She almost tripped over a toppled-over stool and was saved when Dumbledore clutched her shoulder, allowing her to keep her balance.

"What is it?" he asked urgently.

Amanda wordlessly pointed to the little silver coin. Dumbledore followed her arm and his eyebrows shot up to his forehead. Amanda watched on, shaking with the fear brought on by childhood horror tales, as the venerable wizard knelt down and prodded his wand in the coin's direction.

"What is it, Albus?" McGonagall asked from the other side of the room.

"Minerva, Sirius, you must leave this room immediately," Albus commanded. His tone left no room for argument and the two adults must have sensed the urgency behind his tone because they quickly left.

Amanda stayed put, eying the coin like it was a bomb set to explode.

“Was it them?” she asked quietly. “Did they come back for revenge?”

Dumbledore breathed deeply and stood back up, only wincing slightly at the movement.

“Amanda,” he said gravely. “That coin belongs to the Fallen known as Meciél.”

The name sent a jolt through her.

“Meciél?” She asked in confusion. “But that’s Harry’s Fallen.”

“And that is Harry’s coin,” Dumbledore told her quietly. “Whatever danger he faced here, it either ripped it out of him and tossed it aside or-“

“Or Harry knew he was in trouble and left it here for somebody to pick it up,” Amanda concluded with a bitter smile.

“Nobody will be picking up anything,” Dumbledore said firmly. “I have my suspicions already and I am sure that-“

“Albus!” Sirius called from the hallway. “There are two men coming up! They’re carrying swords!”

“Stay here, Amanda,” Dumbledore commanded and was already out of the room in a flurry of robes, leaving a despondent teenage girl staring blankly at the ground.

Harry had been the strongest person she had known. Maybe Dumbledore was more powerful than he was- he was the most powerful wizard in the world- but Harry was so...out there...that it made him seem bigger and nastier than what he really was. Amanda had sparred with him before and had seen him in action. She could only conclude that he had gotten stronger. What enemy could have driven him to literally throw away the only family he had ever loved?

Was he trying to get rescued or, and Amanda's blood chilled at this, was he trying to spare Meciél the pain that he knew would follow?

Harry had a lot of nasty enemies. Who knew what they would do to him?

Dumbledore was talking outside in the corridor and she thought she heard a familiar voice respond. She ignored them both as she knelt down and studied the coin carefully. There was only one other person who knew what had happened here. There was only one other person that could cut through all of the investigation and searching and get straight to the matter of rescuing Harry- if he was still alive.

Amanda wanted to cry as the notion took hold in her mind. She wanted to scream at it and rebel against it. She was dimly aware of a tear trickling down her cheek. Her family...God, how would her family take this? But Amanda had long since decided that she would help Harry however she could. He had saved her life and the life of her family. In the end, he was the hero- not her. If she had to do it to save his life and bring him back, then she had no choice. There was no choice. Harry was in trouble and this might have been the only way to save him? Who else could do this? Still, she hesitated.

The door opened and Amanda turned her head. Professor Dumbledore had walked back in with two burly-shouldered men. Sanya and Daddy both looked at her in surprise and Dumbledore's eyes widened in alarm as he saw the tears on her face.

"Amanda?" Daddy asked in concern.

"I'm sorry," Amanda choked out.

"Wait!" Dumbledore roared.

As Dumbledore's wand appeared in his hand, Amanda gritted her teeth, stilled her mind and reached to grab the coin. Her bare skin touched cold silver and for a moment, everything paused and all she could hear was her own rushing heartbeat. Then, as Amanda took another breath, an incredible searing flame roared up within her and spread to her every facet in her body. Amanda opened her mouth

and screamed in agony as blazing fire ripped through her body. Her limbs flailed and twitched as, from out of nowhere, the rage and fury of a Fallen angel threatened to tear her unprotected mind into pieces.

She was dimly aware of her father crouching down beside her before she closed her eyes and waited for that pure rage to consume her forever.

It was fucking cold.

Harry slumbered uneasily on the cold, hard ground of his little cell. His body felt like it had gone numb long ago and he was barely aware that all of his clothes were missing. Harry could hear footsteps coming towards and shuddered. His entire body was trembling, partly from the cold and partly from the fear that was unwillingly building up within the pit of his stomach. It felt like somebody had gripped his heart and was squeezing it and he dreaded what he knew would come next.

A tinkling noise came from a few feet away from him and Harry didn't need to look to know that a wall of his freezing prison had just disappeared. The footsteps paused and Harry could feel those two soulless eyes staring at his aching and bruised body.

"Hello again, Harry," somebody purred.

Harry opened his eyes and managed a feeble snare, a desperate attempt at bravado.

"Fuckin' bitch!" he snarled pitifully. "I'm sleeping, dammit. Piss off!"

He turned away as displeasure flickered on his captor's face and closed his eyes. Cool, icy fingers grabbed his face and yanked it back again and he opened eyes, emerald green boiling with suppressed rage as his captor smiled.

"There, there, my little pet," Maeve murmured. The Winter Lady stroked his cheek and smiled chillingly. "Keep that fiery spirit up and about, will you? It's more fun this way."

Harry grunted and twitched against his bonds, the crystal-like binds that snaked across his entire body. Then, pain grew within him that was only comparable to the most horrible experiences of his life and he roared with agony, thrashing against his bonds as Maeve's power surged through him, little shards of ice tearing him up from the inside.

"Yes," Maeve gloated and her hands glowed with the power of the Winter Fae as she held them over Harry's chest. "This will be fun."

A/N: Hey guys. Here's Chapter 21. Once again, thanks for the DLP bunch for their help. While I might not agree or heed their advice all of the time, I do take it all under careful consideration. Now, there's been a couple of reviews in the last few chapters about how the descriptives are lacking and were better in Denarian Renegade. I'm all for constructive criticism but you need to give me some examples, like 'before' and 'after' or something, so that I can understand what you mean. Cheers. Read and Enjoy, guys.

There had been several key moments in his life which Albus Dumbledore had later come to regret. His sordid friendship with Gellert Grindelwald was one, the death of his beloved sister and his inability to see through Tom Riddle's ambitions until it was too late were but just a few. Now, as he stood in Harry's dim apartment amidst the cracks and holes of battle listening to the screams of one of the most genuinely nice girls he had ever had the pleasure of meeting, he had the most ominous feeling that years from now he would look back and regard this as one of them too.

Amanda Carpenter was screaming. The very sound struck at Albus like a blow to the soul and he couldn't keep the wince from showing on his face as the blonde-haired girl arched her back, twisting and turning as she flopped along the floor. Her hair flew around her and her muscles were taut with pain. Albus did not know what picking up the coin was like but he had wondered. Nevertheless, this painful reaction surprised even him and, for the first time from what he could remember, he hesitated.

The Knight of the Cross beside him didn't have the qualms that he did and strode forward. Albus shook his head sharply and the man hesitated, his warm brown eyes glistening as he looked upon his own flesh and blood in commune with a demon. The Russian Knight, Sanya, Albus believed his name was, put a hand on Michael's shoulder and gripped it. Michael looked torn, his body trembling, and Albus felt the utmost pity for the other man.

"What do we do?" Sanya asked Albus quietly.

The wizened Headmaster turned his head briefly to glance at him over half-moon glasses. He had long ago chosen that style of glasses for precisely the air they gave off when he looked through or over them in the right way. Now, he almost felt like cursing them for the utter hope that blossomed on Michael's face for he had no solution.

"We must wait," he answered gravely, over the screams of the girl. "We must also pray that Meciél shows an inkling of mercy upon your daughter and spares her mind- if not her soul."

Michael flinched as if he had been struck and Albus turned away. Despite his words, his gnarled fingers stroked his wand almost lovingly. He could feel the tingle of magic surge through his aging frame, revitalising his old flesh and making him feel young again-young enough to fight if need be. If Meciél was hostile towards them from the beginning, then Albus was confident that he could prevail against her. She was in a new and relatively unskilled host body and while he may be past his prime, he knew his strengths and weaknesses.

If Meciél had occupied Harry's body and had decided to strike against him, Albus wasn't quite sure what he would do. The very real possibility of that occurring gave him nightmares and the occasional sleepless night. Harry was skilled and his powers were only complimented by Meciél's gifts. Superhuman reflexes, almost godlike healing powers and a natural flair of magic that left Albus envious at times made for a very dangerous combination.

Then again, Albus thought wryly, if Meciél was occupying Harry's body then there would be no present danger.

Abruptly, Amanda stopped screaming and her body flopped to the ground. Albus took a step forward, peering down at her carefully. Her mouth was parted in a silent expression of utter bewilderment and her grey eyes, normally so warm and cheerful, were closed. Tear marks stained her pale cheeks and Albus could see signs of self-inflicted wounds, nail scratches and bruises as a result from her fit. He resisted the urge to peer into the girl's mind, partly because of the possibility of delivering mental damage to the poor girl's already-battered mind no matter how subtle he was and partly because he

could recall Severus' rather unwise attempts and had no desire to be on the receiving end of a fallen angel's fury.

Then, before his eyes, Amanda slowly clenched her fists and moved. The knights by his side shifted but he remained still, schooling his face into a deliberately polite if not indifferent expression and waiting calmly. Amanda seemed to be having trouble moving as a hand shot out, clutching at the kitchen counter. The teenage girl who was still clad in her Hogwarts robes, pulled herself up but kept her head ducked, her blonde hair obscuring her face.

"Ms Carpenter?" Albus asked quietly.

There was no response. The girl merely stood there, swaying on her feet as her fingers flexed back and forth.

"Amanda?" Michael asked from Albus' side. The Headmaster could hear the hopeful tone in his voice marred with the dread and what his daughter had just done, of what she could have just become. "Amanda, honey? Can you hear me?"

"Yes..."

Her reply was more like an exhale of breath but there was nothing in the tone of her voice that Dumbledore recognised from the upbeat sixteen-year-old. Apparently, Michael had come to the same conclusion because he closed his eyes and muttered something quietly in Latin. His friend gently pulled him back, an action that Dumbledore whole-heartedly approved of. No father should have to put a blade to his own child.

"Albus."

Dumbledore eyed the girl carefully and inclined his head politely, his face revealing nothing of the turbulent emotions boiling beneath the surface of his skin. The next few minutes, he decided, would be critical for Amanda- and Harry's- fate.

"Good afternoon, Meciél," Dumbledore greeted calmly. He peered at the girl over his half-moon glasses, studying her carefully, looking for

any sign of a Meciél's presence on her body. Already, he could see many of the bruises and cuts that adorned the body fading away.

Amanda slowly lifted her head and Dumbledore's couldn't help but grimace at the sight. Amanda's eyes were wreathed with pure fire and radiated a hatred and fury so strong that it made him uncomfortable. During his studies, he had come across hypotheses that suggested that other beings, while feeling many of the same emotions as humans, felt them so much more strongly that they became unrecognisable and incomprehensible to anybody who was not insane. Staring into Meciél's fury, he quietly confirmed the validity of those theories.

There was nothing human in there, not anymore.

"I shall be blunt, Meciél," Dumbledore said quietly, and he couldn't help himself as a dangerous tone entered his voice. Many things hinged on her answer and he wasn't quite sure what he would do if he received the wrong one. "Amanda Carpenter. Does she still exist?"

"Your concern is noted, boy," Amanda- no, Meciél- replied frostily. Her lips quirked into an expression Albus had hoped never to see on a child's face. "I shall also be blunt. Yes, she does."

Albus heard rather than saw the exhaling sigh of relief behind him and felt a large piece of the burden leave his shoulders. He straightened, unable to keep the relieved twinkle from his eyes. He was grateful when the Knights remained silent and allowed him to continue.

"I am relieved to hear that," Albus admitted quietly.

He was. While he understood Amanda's decision to pick up the coin and even approved of it in some way, he did not have to like it. If he was given the choice to choose between Amanda Carpenters life and Harry Potter's life while keeping in mind the context of Lord Voldemort's Second Uprising, then, in the end, he would have to choose Harry Potter- if only for the thousands of other Amanda Carpenters in the world. However, the choice would haunt him for the rest of his life and Albus was sure that he would never forgive himself.

It was something he had to remind himself of right now in his approach towards Meciél.

“This girl picked up my Vessel so that I may tell you this,” Meciél continued and Albus watched as the fires within her eyes grew with her fury. “My beloved host was attacked by the Lady of the Winter Fae. She has taken him from me. I want him back.”

It was as Albus feared. He closed his eyes and suddenly felt a humongous weight settle on his shoulders. Once again, he was indirectly at fault for the sufferings of another. Oh, if only Harry Potter had never attracted the dealings of Lady Maeve. Then again, by picking up the denarius coin Harry had made himself one of the only approachable candidates in the world. It was a delicate balance that Summer and Winter had wrought within the isolated confines of the Wizarding World, one that Albus tenured with great care.

“I see,” Albus murmured. He stroked his beard, feeling himself relax at the unconscious habit. “I suspected it was so.”

“Meciél!” Michael demanded and silver fire flashed through the air. Albus turned his head to see Amanda’s father holding his great and holy sword, brandishing soulfire against the body of his own daughter. “Release my daughter at once!”

Meciél cocked her head and stared at Michael imperiously. Her face twisted in scorn and contempt as she glanced at the silver blade. However, there was a considering look in her eyes and she smiled faintly. “No.” She answered. “I shall not.”

“Release her now!” Michael’s voice boomed in the small apartment and Albus was grateful for the quick charms and he placed it. The situation was delicate enough without Minerva or any other member of the Order walking in on it. “She is not yours for the taking!”

“Your spawn made her decision out of free will,” Meciél answered with coldness unachievable by humans. “She picked up my coin and fully surrendered herself to me on the belief that I would be able to help the object of her pathetic mortal infatuation. Her mind, body and

soul belong entirely to me now, and I shall do with them what I wish. You know this is true, Knight.”

Michael looked grim but stood resolute. Next to him, Sanya stood there looking sympathetic but he too clutched the hilt of his sword. If it came down to it, Albus had no doubt that he too would do what was necessary. He doubted that Michael would. No loving father could ever strike down his own child.

“Ah, but that is the real question,” Dumbledore interjected, quietly diffusing the situation as he turned the attention of both Meciél and Michael onto himself. “Does Meciél truly want the power of Amanda Carpenter to herself?”

Meciél stared at him with glittering eyes.

“You are a very intelligent child, Albus Dumbledore,” she said quietly. Her eyes flickered to Michael. “Fear not, Knight. I do not desire this body or mind. I will find what is mine and I will take it back. After that, this body will be released of all of my influence and her freedom is guaranteed. It will be in your best interest to help me achieve my goal, Knight.”

Michael stood his ground firmly but his relief was palpable. Albus knew that Meciél had just conscripted her first unwilling ally in her quest to save her former host and didn’t know whether to commend or condemn her actions.

“Now,” Dumbledore murmured, eying the apartment carefully. “Before we can do anything, I must know what happened here. From what I understood, Harry took the defence of his home quite seriously and I have no doubt that even I would have trouble subduing him in his place of power.”

“Maeve foresaw that problem and planned accordingly over two years ago,” Meciél explained cryptically.

Albus’ mind only took an instant to piece together the puzzles and he gave a quiet groan.

“Oh dear,” he murmured, stroking his long, white beard purely out of habit. “I see now.”

“What is it?” Sanya asked, looking confused. “What did she do?”

“Yes, that’s right. You do not know,” Albus replied. “The association between Harry and the Winter Lady began two years ago when Harry was bound into the Tri-Wizard Tournament. During the first task and thanks to the machinations of the Outsider Azzeh, Harry was pitted against a genuine Drakon. With no other option, Harry called upon Winter and was granted the power to defeat the Drakon in exchange for a rather simple price: Harry would lay with the Winter Lady and give a child.”

Sanya and Michael both looked astonished.

“His firstborn,” Meciél said and anger clouded her words. Albus thought he could detect some disgust in there, but he didn’t know who it was directed at. “Harry gave Maeve his firstborn child, a daughter named Amaris. Apart from the obvious emotional ties against him, the power of a firstborn child can also be used against the father when used properly. Maeve did not lead this assault, but rather, she commissioned the services of her daughter.”

“And that is why Harry lost,” Albus concluded grimly. “For all of his faults, he could not strike down his own daughter.”

“Amaris broke through the wards in an instant,” Meciél continued. “She brought with her a pack of beasts and set them upon Harry. He defeated them easily but hesitated as Amaris pitted her own power against him and was defeated. His last act was to release my coin, hoping that somebody would grow suspicious and stumble upon it. If it was Dumbledore, then he could piece together the clues. If it was somebody else, then I could lure them in and enslave them to my will long enough for me to call in our allies- which, admittedly, rests entirely with the Headmaster here.”

“When was this?” Albus asked, frowning.

Meciél hesitated for an instant.

"I believe it was twenty hours ago," she replied and there was something undecipherable in her voice. "It is hard to track time within my...prison." Her eyes raked over the Knights. "Those pathetic ideological fools do not understand what it is like. If they had a single ounce of comprehension as to our suffering, they would pick up the coin themselves out of mercy."

"I doubt it," Sanya spoke up thickly. "I have been there before. I have no mercy for you."

"How very...un-Christian...of you," Meciél responded sardonically. Albus noted that she was moving Amanda's body a lot more fluidly than she had been before

"I'm an Atheist," Sanya deadpanned.

Meciél started in surprise and looked astonished. Then, before Dumbledore's eyes, a little bit of the overwhelming fury he could sense in the diminutive blonde girl before him faded and she chuckled quietly.

"How ironic," she murmured. She turned her gaze to Albus and held herself like a Queen staring down at her lowly subjects. "Harry is important to you, to your Order, to your war. You and your order will assist me in getting him back."

Albus was silent but knew that she was absolutely right for a few of the wrong reasons. He had much more personal reasons for rescuing Harry, a very potent wizard in his own right, from the clutches of the Winter Lady. Already, his old brain was humming as he spun plans within plans. Yes...he had contacts still within the Summer Court...there were some beings of old that owed him favours...tracing the Nevernever path that Amaris had taken from the apartment might be troublesome but he was confident that he could get in the general area. Yes. A rescue attempt was necessary.

The Winter Court could not be allowed to own Harry Potter. For Albus, the Fallen Angel Meciél was a much more preferable choice in the end. At the very least, he could counter her motives with his own.

"There is much more to discuss but I agree," Albus replied a few moments later. His eyes were hardened and he felt the thrill of impending conflict surging through his tired old body. "But first, we shall make a bargain. Meciél, in exchange for our assistance in claiming back your host, Harry Potter, you shall return Amanda Carpenter to her full faculties, unharmed, free of demonic or otherwise other influence. Do we have a deal?"

"Yes," Meciél responded immediately. Something dark gleamed in the cheerful eyes of Amanda Carpenter. "We must hurry. I will not allow his suffering to continue. I have lost much in this mortal world of yours. I will not lose him."

"You're very determined, aren't you?" Sanya asked quietly, while Michael continued to remain silent and grim. The Russian knight stared at Amanda's possessed body curiously. "I have never seen a Fallen display this much...I don't know."

"Of course you haven't," Albus responded quietly. "After all, love is the greatest motivation of them all. Isn't that right, Meciél?"

"Believe me, boy," Meciél said through Amanda's lips. "I know more of the follies of love than you could ever possibly know."

Albus inclined his head. Of that he had no doubt.

"But it is irrelevant," Meciél continued.

She frowned and took a slow but steady step forward. Albus watched as the Knights parted and Meciél walked past them. Michael lifted a hand as if to place it against Amanda's shoulder but he hesitated. Albus could only muster pity within him as he looked at the torn and agonised expression of the Knight. The emotional trials and tribulations the man must be feeling were immense, far too great for Albus to properly empathise with.

He had never had children. How could he possibly know what it was like?

It was this that made him place his good hand on Michael's shoulder. The knight turned his head as Albus squeezed down softly, his lips not moving but his eyes saying everything that needed to be said. Michael nodded stiffly and Albus dropped his arm.

"We need to make haste," Meciél concluded after testing out her new body. "Time flows differently in Winter. It has been less than a day for me. It may have already been less than a month for Harry."

Again, Albus could feel the utter fury and rage that the Fallen was feeling. He sensed that the possessed girl was having trouble reigning in her temper and, for the first time in his life, saw the stark similarities between one of the Fallen and one of the Knights.

Both were determined and filled with anger.

Both had had their children taken away from them.

"I will call a meeting," Albus said abruptly. "While the members are congregating, I shall contact some old acquaintances of mine." He strode forward and without hesitation, he placed a hand on Amanda's shoulder. The muscles stiffened underneath his bony fingers but Dumbledore ignored them as he gazed into Meciél's fire-wreathed eyes. "I promise you, Meciél. I shall do everything in my power to help him."

The Fallen stared back at him coolly, as if assessing his worth. For the first time in a hundred years, Albus Dumbledore felt like fidgeting as the gaze wracked over him much like the Headmaster's had back in his First Year of school. Then, Meciél smiled thinly and patted Albus' hand.

"Don't tell anybody but I like you, Albus Dumbledore," she responded, almost kindly. She smiled at him mysteriously. "I think your ancestors would be very proud of what you have grown up to become."

Albus started at that as Meciél smiled again.

"Yes," she continued. "They would be very proud indeed."

Albus honestly had no words to say to that and, if he could admit it to himself, he didn't like the implications in that sentence. He watched as Meciél, easily controlling Amanda's body perfectly by now, strode to the other side of the battle-scarred apartment and knelt down.

"I have neither the mood nor the time for subtleties and secrecy," Meciél declared quietly. "I shall take back what is mine not with the silver tongue but with the silver sword."

Silver light burst into existence in the room and Albus couldn't stop the surprise from showing on his face as he stared forward in amazement. The Meciél-possessed Amanda stood up, her flesh sizzling and burning as the Sword of the Cross- Harry's Sword of the Cross- lit up like a bonfire for her. Next to him, both Michael and Sanya gaped at the scene.

"Impossible!" the Russian Knight gasped.

Albus' mind was working shrewdly. He had seen Amanda touch the silver sword before and there had not even been a glimmer of light. Now, the sword blazed in the blonde's hand, silver flames licking furiously at the blackening skin even as Meciél repaired it moments later. Meciél herself appeared to be unaffected by the pain as she watched Albus, who made the connection with a start.

"My word," Albus murmured. "Harry Potter was never the Knight of the Cross, was he?"

"No, he was not," Meciél replied. Something unsettling crossed her face. "I don't know the why but I can understand the how. In the end, I truly do not care. This sword will be my tool once more."

"Did Harry know?" Albus asked.

"Why did it matter? We were one, Harry and I. That was all that mattered," Meciél answered. "Now, take me to your Order. We have little time and I can sense that he has already suffered so very much."

There seemed to be a common theme amongst the books and movies that suggested that a truly brave and courageous man could

resist the agonising pain of torture and refuse to give the torturer the pleasure of screaming. The torturer would grow angry and apply more and more punishment in which the victim would just smile in victory and pass out at the right moment, denying his captor the satisfaction of breaking his victim.

Harry called bullshit on that one.

Torture fucking hurt. It really, really hurt. It especially hurt when the torturer was a being that was who-knows-how old with a penchant for misery and a sadistic edge that made the worse sociopath look like a naughty child. When he was being tortured, he considered it a smart move to avoid what pain he could over puffing up his pride. Maeve didn't need any more incentive to hurt him. She already had that in buckets.

Harry was distantly aware that he was screaming in agony but it didn't matter to him. He was above pain, beyond pain, his mind hovering just far enough from his body to be aware of its actions. Every bit of his mental concentration was being used to hold together this ancient mind technique thingy- something that Meciél had drilled into his head the last time the two of them had been separated. It was like he could see his own body before him, his skin all frost-bitten and blue and his digits missing, reddened frozen stumps for fingers and toes. He was missing all of his hair and not just from the top of his head and his back- well, it made even Harry feel a tad queasy and he couldn't have that.

Any loss of concentration and he'd come rushing back into his battered body.

It had happened a few times before. Harry would like to say that it took hours for Maeve to break his mental hold but he was kidding himself. In less than a minute, Maeve had reached into his head and dragged him back to the agonisingly painful world of real life- and fuck, it hurt so badly. It only reaffirmed his position here in Maeve's little castle. The Winter Lady was playing with him, testing and prodding him like a small child might do to an injured bug before squashing him.

It was almost relieving to think of it like that. Harry didn't know what he would do if this were to last for the rest of his long- and Maeve would make sure it would be long- life.

He became aware that his screaming had stopped and immediately drifted back in close enough to pick up his external senses. Maeve didn't like it when she talked to him and received no answer and had showed her displeasure accordingly. Immediately, his vision swam, the icy walls of his prison fading in and out of focus and his entire body literally throbbed with pain. It was painful, yes, but only a fraction of what he really should be feeling. He took deep breaths, one after the other, in and out, in and out as his turbulent emotions swam to the foreground. Panic, fear and unbridled rage assaulted him from all directions and he was barely aware of his body thrashing about. Then, something cool and oh-so familiar slide across his chest and his muscles went limp.

"It's been quite a few days now, Harry," somebody whispered huskily.

Harry shuddered with fear.

Maeve slid into view, her beautiful and provocative clothing covered with drops of his blood. Her green feline-slanted eyes gazed upon him almost fondly as she raised a pale hand and licked the tip of her finger. Harry followed the digit with nothing short of horror in his eyes. He knew what Maeve was capable of doing to the human body with just that one little finger.

"I'll admit, your perseverance is quite endearing," Maeve continued and laughed. "If I didn't know better, I'd say that you were sticking around because you like me. Is that it, Harry? Do you like me?"

She leaned forward, her rotten breath on his face, and Harry hated himself as lust and warmth stirred beneath his broken body. Maeve smiled coyly and Harry groaned, shaking his head and thrashing against the chains of ice that held him immobile against the wall of his cell. There was only one thing worse than the pain and that was the humiliation. Maeve slid her fingers over Harry's body, caressing his aching flesh with skilful movements that had all the signs of genuine affection. Wherever her fingers went, warmth followed and Harry

sighed in relief despite himself, his consciousness sinking further and further into his body as Maeve coaxed out of him the pleasurable and warm feelings that he despised.

It would have been better if Maeve had abruptly twisted her fingers into one of his wounds. At least Harry would have been bought back to his senses. But, instead, Maeve continued her roaming, spreading tingles of pleasure throughout his body. Her hands dipped lower and lower and Harry gritted his teeth, unable to bear it. Glamours assaulted his mind and his senses became saturated with the very essence of Maeve. Her smell filled his nose and the sensation of her loose glacial-coloured hair against his bare skin became painfully pleasurable. Just as he was about to succumb to it, Maeve stopped.

The sensations immediately flooded out his mind and Harry let out a heart-wrenching groan. He wanted to scream, to thrash against his bonds and demand that Maeve continue. Why, oh why did she have to bring him back to the pain? Maeve took a step backwards as Harry sagged against his bonds, his body leaning forward and his head coming to rest on her shoulder. His mind fully centred on his body under Maeve's skilful ministrations, Harry screamed in agony as the pain and torture Maeve had inflicted upon him came back to him three-fold. Every nerve in his body howled at him as Harry thrashed and foamed at the mouth. It was one of the most agonising things that he had ever felt and the drawback to the techniques Harry was using. Eventually, it all caught up with him and all at once. But, he couldn't stop doing it. It was his only release, his only escape from the pain.

As Harry screamed his throat hoarse, pain overtaking every perception and sensation in his body, Maeve put a soft hand on the back of his head and took him into a gentle hug. She rocked him back and forth, like a mother comforting a scared child, and stroked his hair lovingly. Her lips came down to his ears and she whispered soft and comforting phrases. Harry could only focus on those murmurs as they took him away from the pain that assaulted his body and gave him the strength to endure.

Maeve didn't need glamours and illusions to break Harry's mind.

“W-why?” Harry croaked out a few minutes later after Maeve had taken away all of his pain. His body was deliciously numb and he hated himself for loving the sensation. “T-this...is...why?”

“Harry, Harry, Harry,” Maeve chided lightly and bopped him on the nose with her finger. “Curiosity did kill the cat. You shouldn’t ask so many questions. Actually, you should start answering a few of my own.”

Harry choked and stared at her with wide eyes.

“You haven’t asked any!” he exclaimed hysterically.

“Oh,” Maeve uttered in surprise. “That’s right. I haven’t.”

Harry couldn’t help it and burst out into hysterical laughing. For some reason, it was the funniest thing that Harry had ever heard in his short life. He laughed and laughed, his body shaking against the icy chains that surrounded him as Maeve stepped back and watched him with glittering eyes.

It really fucking hurt.

He had to remember, Harry decided as he was laughing. He had to remember Meciél. Yes. Meciél. Meciél. Meciél. Meciél. Harry chanted the name in his head as his laughs turned into coughs, his body shaking with weakness. Meciél would come. Meciél would save him. Meciél loved him. He wasn’t aware of his lips moving but suddenly a pale hand came out of nowhere and slapped him clear across the face. His body rocked under the force of the blow and his widened green eyes gazed at Maeve, who withdrew her hand calmly.

“Don’t lie to yourself, Harry,” Maeve chided. “If Meciél truly loved you, she wouldn’t have abandoned you in your most dire moment of need, would she? If she loved you, she would be here with you now, holding you and tending to you-like I am. Tell me, Harry, where is she?”

Harry was smart enough not to tell Maeve where he had dropped Meciél's coin. It had been a lucky break when Amaris had looked over it during their short duel.

"Why..." he asked instead. "Why are you doing this? You have to tell me, Maeve."

"I do?" Maeve asked with quirked eyebrows.

"It's...a mortal tradition." Harry managed a tight grin. "Whenever the main character...gets captured by the bad guy...the bad guy always tells them their evil plans...so the good guy can ruin them when he escapes."

Maeve stared at him and Harry waited for the pain that she might inflict upon him. Then, to his surprise, she tossed her head back and laughed in pure amusement.

"Oh, Harry, you do entertain me so," she said. "Very well. Do you want to know why I'm doing this, Harry? Remember that we Fae cannot lie."

That couldn't lie directly. Harry was started to get used to Maeve's word games in a way. She might not lie but she could twist words, say something and meaning something else and throw all semblance of context out the window. He nodded carefully, anything to get it to stop for a few moments and give him time to rest. Maeve smiled coolly.

"Essentially," she said. "I want the Wizarding World."

Harry couldn't understand that. Sure, there were a few powerful wand-wizards here and there. Dumbledore and he were two examples, Lord Voldemort was another. But, Harry had noticed that the truly most powerful wizards of this time were all men who had broken away from the severe isolation that the Wizarding World offered and found their powers elsewhere. Harry had Meciél. Voldemort had his dark-ritual from wherever. Dumbledore had...

"Fawkes," Harry murmured, his tired mind putting it all together.

Maeve smiled at him coolly.

"I can't directly intervene with that world. None of the Fae can. We do not go back on our bargains...but we are encouraged to follow the word of the agreement rather than the spirit," Maeve answered. "Summer claimed Albus Dumbledore when he approached them and has been influencing the Wizarding World ever since. I had hoped to claim you and do the same, you who fell under my domain the moment you picked up that coin."

Harry groaned weakly.

"Yes," Maeve continued and stroked his bald head, making him shiver. "You were young and powerful. But, you quickly proved to be unworthy- or, rather, unsuitable- for my plans. I had to find another proxy. Somebody powerful, somebody with similar ambitions to me, somebody who could lay the foundations of my power or, at the very least, remove the foundations of Summer's power. Do you know who I'm talking about, Harry?"

Harry groaned again and Maeve smiled.

"There, there," she murmured seductively. "Now you have my evil plans. I eagerly await your attempts to foil them."

"Why...kidnap me?"

"You're powerful, Harry," Maeve answered. "Not as powerful as your enemy, but powerful enough. Besides," she leaned forward and grasped Harry's chin, lifting his head so that his eyes met hers. "I do not forget a slight."

Harry stared into her soulless eyes and then dropped his gaze dully. The agony of his body was already beginning to return to his body and his limbs were trembling. Maeve took a step back and gazed down at him carefully.

"I think we're done here for today. Don't you agree, Harry?"

Harry could have wept. Her next words, though, caused a strange lurch to go through his heart.

“Amaris!” Maeve called. “Come in here and heal your father.”

Harry swallowed thickly and his eyes rose up unwillingly. Appearing next to her mother was his daughter, who once again had aged a few years. The time-dilation affects of the Nevernever scared Harry the most. He had been in here for a week, roughly. How long had passed on the outside when his daughter looked as if she were fourteen or fifteen years old? Her long black hair shimmered around her and her identical set of green eyes met those of her father. She wore a variation of those simple little white dresses that she had been so fond of but there was no sign or speck of human emotion on those cold, dead eyes of hers.

Harry couldn’t stand to look at her. Every time he did, he replayed his capture in his head and reviewed the openings he had had, the chances he could have taken to kill her. He had grown to hate her as much as her mother. Yet, just the same, he had grown dependent on the way Amaris mended his broken body. Harry’s affection and hatred for his own flesh and blood grew every time Amaris casually ran her hand through his hair or her pale digits stroked the side of his cheek.

Something blocked Harry’s view of Amaris and he blinked confusedly, squinting upwards. Maeve stood above him, smiling down at him fondly. She always did, after one of her sessions.

“Harry, my pet,” she cooed at him. She lifted a hand and stroked his bald head lovingly. “You’ve been a very good boy today, haven’t you?”

The question was humiliating. What was more humiliating was when Harry glowered at her furiously but reluctantly nodded his head. The first time he had refused to answer a question, Maeve had asked if his tongue had been injured and had promptly pulled it out of his mouth, along with most of his teeth.

“Yes,” he dragged out with a hiss, the words torn from the very depths of his soul.

“Yes, what?”

“I...” Harry bared his teeth and screwed his eyes shut. “I’ve been a good boy!”

“There we are,” Maeve murmured and Harry wanted to fucking scream at it all. “When pets are good, they get to have a treat. Here’s your treat, Harry.”

Harry tensed as she ran her hand over his head. Wherever her pale flesh touched his skin, Harry could feel little prickles as she coaxed a nest of messy black hair from his bald head. It would do little to stop the coldness but Harry knew from personal experience that trying to rest on this floor with no hair was futile.

“Harry, do you think that I love you?” Maeve murmured as she stroked Harry’s hair gently.

No. Not this.

Harry shook his head in frantic denial.

“Is that what you think?” Maeve asked quietly, her face full of regret. A tender expression crossed her face and she bent down until her face was right in front of Harry’s.

He focussed on her eyes, her cruel, cold eyes. No matter how well Maeve played with his emotions, she could never hide her intentions from her soulless eyes. But...lately...hadn’t Maeve’s eyes...been growing fond? Harry shook his head again desperately in an attempt to stamp out those thoughts.

“Harry. I want you to say it for me,” Maeve whispered affectionately. “Just between you and me, Harry. Say it for me. Say that I love you.”

Harry shook his head frantically again. His breathing was frantic and his blood was surging through his body as Maeve smiled gently. She

leaned forward and Harry groaned as her lips met his in a tender, loving kiss. He hated himself as he eagerly leaned forward, trying in vain to nestle against the warmth of her body. The Winter Lady drew forward his desperate need for affection and comfort and he responded full in kind as he escaped his pain in the softness that was her lips.

Then it was over. Harry gasped for breath and his body shook as the coldness abruptly returned. Maeve broke off the kiss and smiled at Harry tenderly. She reached forward and stroked his cheek.

“Don’t worry, beloved,” Maeve said quietly.

Harry twitched at the familiar endearment, which had been perverted from him forever.

“I’ll be back soon. We’ll be together again soon. I’ll be here for you again.” She gently lifted Harry’s head and pointed it in Amaris’ direction. “Do you see Amaris, Harry? Do you see your daughter? Amaris loves you just as much as I do. In fact, she can show much she loves you right now just as soon as she’s done making you feel better. Aren’t you lucky?”

Harry sagged against his bonds and Maeve stepped away. As she strode away from Harry’s defeated body, Amaris watched her mother leave with a blank expression before turning her inhuman gaze upon the form of her father.

A/N: Here's the next part. It's late, so I won't say anything else. As usual, thanks to Jon and DLP.

Harry wasn't quite sure how time worked here.

He knew the Nevernever was an alternate world of magic, that it stretched on beyond comprehensions and that the closest parts of it to Earth were the Fae Courts. Still, while the Fae courts were close to earth they weren't actually on earth as such-more to the side. It seemed that a lot of the rules Harry had gotten used to, i.e. the rules of physics, didn't seem to matter much. Time was one of these rules. At times, he could feel the world around him go by at an agonisingly slow pace and every fibre in his being screamed at the wrongness of it. At other times, the world seemed to whip by at an amazing pace until he felt dizzy and sick. It fluctuated too, running slow for days on end with occasional spikes of quickness. It made it hard for Harry to judge how long he had already been in this ice-covered hellhole.

He judged that he had already been in there for a few days, maybe a week or so- he wasn't quite sure. The pain he endured seemed to go on forever. At least once a day, Maeve walked in and did her utmost best to completely and utterly fuck him over, both mentally and physically. Harry was no stranger to pain but her psychological attacks were undoubtedly effective. There hadn't been any explicit sexual torture just yet and Harry was dreading the day that it would happen- and he knew it would. The darker side of his mind could think of a million different ways that could make his stay in here turn from unbearable to really fucking unbearable. Judging by Maeve's occasional comment and the disturbing glint in her soulless eyes, so could she too.

The reverse-psychology mindfuck that Maeve used on him was pitiful against the emotions that his own daughter stirred up when she took Maeve's place and tore him to little pieces. It would help if Amaris didn't completely act like her mother in all things, and Harry meant in all things. Sure, Amaris was attractive in a weird sort of way but there was a sense of utter wrongness that surprised even Harry when she chose to replicate some of Maeve's more...twisted...sessions. Harry

was surprised that he even had those types of morals left, but he attributed it to the fact that he had seen Amaris as a little girl and was having a bit of trouble seeing her as a teenage-Maeve clone. In a way, Amaris was both better and worse than Maeve. Worse, in that it was his own flesh and blood taking large chunks of his flesh and blood out of him. Better, in that Amaris had in no way come close to mastering or even understanding emotional displays and her words were said in a tone so bland that Harry could shrug them off- most of the time.

“Tell me, Harry, do you think I love you?”

The question, an echo of her mother's words, was asked so dully and lacking emotion that Harry couldn't help but chuckle weakly. He was in luxurious bedroom this time as Maeve and Amaris shifted him from place to place to suit their dominatrix needs. Harry would have welcomed the large, fluffy bed and the slightly warmer air if Maeve hadn't hung him upside down from the window in the pitch black and summoned a snowstorm to 'cool his temper'. He had lost his clothes long ago and could only scream in pain as the fierce wings tore at his exposed and unprotected body greedily.

At least with Amaris, you could get in the occasional backchat.

“Amaris, Amaris, Amaris. You're not good at that, are you?” Harry chided hoarsely.

He could practically feel Amaris' frown- and by frown he meant a slight wrinkling of the nose- as she began to loosen the bonds around his feet. It couldn't have come at a better time as he felt blood dripping from his nose and falling down into the darkness. His head was pounding and his legs were numb, his vision blurring in and out of focus. As the blood rushed to his head, Maeve had told him that the moment he fainted she would let him fall down. Fortunately for her, the fall wouldn't have killed him but the starving beasts down there would have pounced on him in an instant. Maeve had practically smirked at him when she uttered casually, as an afterthought, that it wasn't food that they had been deprived with and that male malks mated in packs and he really should try to stay awake.

Maeve was one sadistic bitch.

"I apologise," Amaris uttered quietly. "I will work on my technique in future sessions."

"Oh," Harry uttered and rolled his eyes. "That's just great."

Amaris ignored his sarcasm as she hauled him in away from the roof and laid him gently on the bed. Harry closed his eyes and his lips parted with relief as the blood rushed through his body, his circulation starting up again. His legs were still numb but Harry figured that that was probably because of the large sheets of ice stuck to them.

"You are terribly injured," Amaris said gravely. "I must heal you, or many of your limbs and digits will have to be amputated."

Harry grimaced and thrashed against his bonds half-heartedly and wasn't surprised when the blackened ice chains that encircled him resisted his attempts to break free. The strange ice not only seemed indestructible, but they sapped him of his strength and energy.

Harry hated things that did that to him. It just seemed unfair.

He looked up blearily as the bed sunk by his side and tried to prepare mentally as Amaris lifted her hands. Her pale fingers were glowing with a soft, blue light and Harry shivered, knowing just what that specific type of healing magic brought. It wasn't painful, oh no, Harry had long since figured that Maeve, and Amaris by extension, preferred to hurt people through the proper application of pleasure.

"So, Amaris," Harry asked through gritted teeth. "Here we are, once again."

"Yes we are, Father," Amaris answered quietly.

The former Denarian host lay there silently, both cursing and blessing Amaris and her powers as she gently moved her hands across his flesh, melting the long sticks of ice that she herself had so kindly shoved into him under the pretence of practising her acupuncture. The reasoning had been so pathetic that Harry had almost thought

that Amaris had been making a joke, before realising that the dark-haired girl was deadly serious.

To her, all he seemed to be was an experiment in which she could practise on. In a lot of ways, that hurt more than anything Maeve could ever do to him, which was probably why the Winter Lady allowed it to happen.

"Can I ask you a question?" Amaris asked after a few moments.

"You just did," Harry retorted. Amaris blinked and Harry giggled maniacally, his laugh ending with a series of thick, painful coughs. "Ah, fuck," he groaned. "Spend a few days here and I start to lose my awesome sense of humour."

"Do you like this?" Amaris asked quietly. At the same time, her healing powers flared within him and Harry bit his tongue to hold back the groan as his body stirred under the increasingly rare warmth.

"What, do I like my own daughter feeling me up like a...like a... like some kind of generic random southern inbred hick?" Harry asked sharply, stuttering at the end.

Fuck, he really had lost his edge.

Amaris cocked her head, peering at him curiously. Then, she lifted her hand and casually backhanded him across the cheek. Harry's body rocked under the surprisingly powerful blow and the repressed ball of anger welled up underneath his skin. His eyes may have lost the Hellfire that had made them appear so fearsome but boiling rage in his green orbs made Amaris pause. The slim, dark-haired girl lowered her hand.

"I apologise, but Mother said that I must punish you if you ever raise your voice to me," Amaris explained blandly, her tone anything but apologetic.

"And you do whatever your mother says, because you're such a fucking good little girl!" Harry hissed.

Amaris slapped him again and Harry, with some effort pushed back all of his anger and fury. He could almost see Maeve's goals here, to get him to snap and lose it, but he refused to let the bitch win like that.

"I apologise, but Mother said that I must punish you if you ever use such uncivilised language in my presence again."

"Yeah, yeah, I know, I know," Harry growled angrily. "She only said that because I am uncivilised!"

"Mother said that if a pet misbehaves, we must punish it until it learns that it is wrong," Amaris remarked quietly. Her hand came up and stroked his hair almost-hesitantly. "Mother said people do this to show that they love the pet but dislike the behaviour."

"Mother said this, mother said that," Harry mimicked. He sneered, feeling disgusted at his daughter. "Do you ever think for yourself?"

"No," Amaris answered immediately and Harry paused.

"So I can't try to convince you that independence and all that shit will help you and that you should free me?" Harry asked and sighed. Damn, his cheeks hurt.

"No."

Harry fell silent, his emotions surging under his blank mask. He almost felt like separating his mind from his body but Amaris' powers stopped him. For the next few minutes, the two were silent as Amaris once again began to heal him. Harry missed the numbness as it left his senses, the thick, rough scent of Winter and the decay that it brought along turning his stomach. His skin prickled, especially the newly knitted and grown skin along his legs. At least the bed was comfortable, Harry thought to himself, then stilled as Amaris casually laid a hand on his naked thigh.

"Are we going to do this again?" Harry asked tiredly. "It's not happening, you little brat."

"You're not that much taller than I am." Amaris cocked her head and Harry got the distinct feeling that she was not pleased.

Nevertheless, she took her hand away and knelt by his side silently. Harry struggled with the next words, beating down any vestiges of self-esteem he had left, and looked Amaris in the eye.

"Amaris," he said quietly and earnestly. "You have to help me."

Amaris cocked her head curiously.

"You're not like your mother," Harry murmured softly. He was breathing heavily and his heart felt like it was explode from his chest as the words rushed out of him. "You're not like that bitch!"

Amaris automatically raised her hand.

"I can see! I can see what she can't!" Harry hissed furiously and Amaris paused. "I can see the little nugget of me past all that blank-stared Fae shit! If you think I'm lying, then go right ahead and hit me!"

Amaris considered it, while Harry watched on with speculative eyes. He had to stifle the urge to shout for joy when his daughter slowly lowered her hand, her eyes still blank, and surprised the fierce feelings within him.

"You can help me, Amaris," Harry whispered. He saw Amaris still and rushed on. "We're the same, you and me. If you help me, I can take you away with me and we can go somewhere far away from here. Did you like the beach? We can go back to the beach!"

"I cannot help you," Amaris said quietly. "I have made my decision. I have embraced my Sidhe heritage. I am Winter and Winter is me. There is nothing else."

"Amaris..."

"You are asking me to go against Mother," Amaris said blandly. She delivered a vicious slap to Harry, who accepted it with a bitter frown

and an unconscious growl of rage. "You are asking me to go against my kin, my beliefs, my family."

"I am your fucking family!" Harry roared in sudden anger.

Amaris started at his rage and Harry thrashed madly against his bonds. Adrenaline surged through him, giving him greater strength. Perhaps Amaris had underestimated his potential strength of perhaps Harry was stronger than he thought, but he managed to strain against his bonds far enough so that one of his hands became free. Amaris' eyes widened as Harry lurched at her, his strong hand closing around her pale, exposed throat and squeezing against it firmly. In that split second, Harry knew he could have snapped her neck.

He didn't. He couldn't. Not while he was staring up into her face like that. Not when he could see the carefully masked fear and sudden vulnerability hidden behind a set of oh-so familiar green eyes.

Fuck. He was pathetic. He couldn't even kill one of the bitches who had been torturing him

He couldn't even kill his own daughter.

Pathetic.

As the rage surged through him, it was dimmed by a sudden rush of hesitation. His fingers squeezed, no doubt leaving bruises, but Amaris merely knelt there, her identical green eyes without a trace of fear as her Father literally held her life in his hands. Harry was tempted, oh how he was tempted. But, in the end he smiled mirthlessly and relaxed his grip, although he still kept his hands wrapped around Amaris' throat.

"Fucking hell, Amaris," he said tiredly. The sudden rush of energy had greatly weakened him and he felt like he was about to fall asleep at any moment. "I'm your family. I'm your father, for fuck's sake! I'm not asking you to stand against her, I'm just asking you to stand with me for once!"

"It..." Amaris started, her hand coming up and gently loosening his fingers away from her throat. His hand flopped down uselessly and he fell back on the bed, his sudden burst of strength faded. "It is the same thing," she continued quietly.

"This hurts, Amaris," Harry said. There was no fear or misery in his voice, just a tone of utter tiredness. "You have no idea how much this really hurts. I can shrug off a lot of things, so believe me when I say that this really hurts. I refuse to let Maeve win but... it really, really hurts and I'm just tired."

"Are you giving up?" Amaris asked, just a tad sharply in Harry's opinion.

Harry smiled thinly.

"The day I give up is the day I die," he murmured. "Until then, count on me on giving my best to fuck Maeve up."

Amaris considered this quietly as Harry lay there, looking defeated in every sense of the word. Mentally, he was already planning and readying himself for Maeve or Amaris' next session of pain. He was not going to break. He was not going to die. He was not going to let Maeve win. Harry repeated the mantra and ignored the little voice in the back of his head that said that Maeve was too powerful and it was too cold and he was so tired...

"There is another way."

"What?" Harry was confused.

"There is another way for you to escape this," Amaris elaborated.

"Let me guess," Harry muttered. "If I join you, I'll be free and blah blah blah."

"Yes," Amaris said and Harry rolled his eyes. "You will be free if you join me."

The slender Fae took Harry's attentive silence as an expression of interest and continued, speaking slowly as if she was choosing her words with great care.

"Things...are not well within Mother's court," Amaris said quietly. "There is resentment. There is rebellion. Mother has focussed much of her attentions on the Wizarding World and neglected her duties."

"What are you saying, Amaris?" Harry asked softly, eying the girl as best he could from his position for any sign of deceit. He wasn't quite sure how the Fae-cannot-lie rule applied to her just yet.

"There are certain parties out there that want her removed," Amaris answered bluntly and without any emotion. She spoke in monotone, as if discussing nothing more important than the weather. "Join me. Work with me so we can depose Mother."

"Oh, I see," Harry said as realisation dawned upon him. His lips quirked up cynically. "I join you, but I need to obey Maeve for a certain amount of time to trick her...do a few jobs, get my hands dirty...and then you'll do your little 'coup'."

"Yes," Amaris answered seriously.

"I'm not stupid, Amaris," Harry retorted as sharply as he could. "Bit of a hothead, sure, but not a complete moron."

"On the contrary, Father, you are stupid," Amaris declared rather flatly- at least for her.

Harry watched her and his eyes became flat as Amaris leaned forward. For a split second, it was easily apparent that the two were related by blood with their identical sets of eyes and the blank mask they both wore. The only difference was that one mask was put on by necessity and the other because she honestly did not know anything else.

Amaris cupped his chin and pressed her lips against his. Contrary to her nature, Harry decided that she was either a very bad kisser or the idea of making out with his daughter was slightly upsetting. He

couldn't help but marvel at the sheer amount of emotion that she pushed forward as she devoured his lips fiercely. Harry was taken aback by the sheer passion of the kiss but remained motionless during the ordeal, ignoring the tingles of pleasure Amaris created in the pit of his stomach.

Finally, Amaris leaned back. Harry saw the flush on her cheeks and the darkening of her eyes and grimaced. His body felt lightened and he couldn't deny that physiological reactions that she created. Nonetheless, Amaris looked vaguely disappointed.

"I love you, Father," she said honestly and Harry twitched. "Just say yes. You can be mine and I can be yours. We don't have to be enemies. We're blood, family. We can be together."

"Yeah, we're blood," Harry spoke up, his voice and emotions strained. "Dammit, Amaris. You're my daughter! I'm pretty fucked up but I'm not Nicodemus and I don't plan on having sex with my own children."

"Even if they're sexually attractive?"

"Especially if they're sexually attractive," Harry emphasised.

Amaris was quiet and Harry lay back on the bed, determined to make the most of the small creature comforts as best he could no matter what incestuous fantasies his daughter may have been having. Amaris, on the other hand, looked contemplative and was choosing her words carefully.

"Do you know that there is a theory about human sexual relationships?" Amaris began. "It proposes that young girls idolise their fathers and will seek out partners and husbands amongst a certain selection of men who match the traits and attributes of their fathers as a substitute."

She turned her eyes onto him and Harry was surprised and disturbed to see an almost-maniacal glint in them.

"Do you see? I am merely aiming for loftier goals. Instead of the substitute, I want the real thing."

"That's..." Harry trailed off. "Er...that's Freud, right?" He paused, feeling confused. "Wait. You read Freud?"

Amaris cocked her head, something Harry noticed that she did a lot when she felt surprised, confused, puzzled or interested. It was just a matter of guessing which emotion it was.

"I wished to understand more about my human side," Amaris answered blandly. "Apparently, I am a very disturbed young girl."

Harry couldn't have put it any better himself.

Amaris stood up and stepped off the bed. Her eyes raked over her father's naked form but Harry was too used to the treatment to feel any shame from his state. Satisfied with what she saw, Amaris bowed her head.

"You are fully healed so I will depart," Amaris said quietly. "But consider me, Father. There is no other choice. Kill Mother, so you can escape this. Kill Mother, so I can be with you."

"I don't want you," Harry stated firmly.

Amaris cocked her head.

"Perhaps you do not desire me that way," she conceded. "But consider this: Mother does."

Harry's emotionless face twitched and his disgust welled up. Amaris observed his reaction with no outward sign of emotion.

"Save me, Father, and you save yourself," Amaris said quietly. "What do you have to lose?"

"My soul?"

"You have already lost it," Amaris retorted. She leaned forward and looked disturbingly grim. "Mother has just not taken it yet."

Harry's lip curled but he made sure to remain silent as he pushed all of his emotions downwards. Amaris seemed satisfied and turned around, her white dress flaring around her dramatically as she left the room. When she had left, he growled with anger and thrashed against his bonds for good measure. Join her, yeah, like he was that stupid! Her comments had only renewed his determination to resist. If he focussed on that, maybe he could ignore the little niggling doubt in the back of his mind. Damn it.

Pain, he could handle. This psychological bullshit was beginning to really screw with him and it pissed him off.

"That was very convincing. I was almost worried for a minute there but you seemed to have him under perfect control."

"Thank you, Mother," Amaris accepted the compliment with a graceful duck of her head.

Maeve petted her like she would an animal as she turned back to the transparent glass before her, cunningly disguised as a wall on the other side. The little Denarian was thrashing against his bonds, looking sullen and angry, and Maeve couldn't help but chuckle.

"I don't see why you want him," she remarked casually and glanced down at her daughter. "I can give you a dozen men just as pretty as he is."

"They will not be him," Amaris said quietly. "It is not his looks that I want. It is his fire."

Maeve chuckled again.

"Little spawn of mine, this is the Court of Winter," she said amusingly. "All fires, no matter how strong they burn, die here."

"When his will is broken then he will no longer amuse me," Amaris said blandly. "When he no longer amuses me then he will die."

"Very well," Maeve said, looking like she was merely humouring her daughter. Amaris was odd, even by Fae standards. "I want him to

remain alive and he will- he is too powerful a bargaining chip against my allies, even without the Fallen's powers."

Amaris endured another round of hair-petting, which ended with a sly stroke of the cheek. Maeve smiled chillingly and bent down, planting a soft kiss at the end of Amaris' nose.

"He will be yours daughter, provided my ambitions come into fruition."

"Then, I shall seek to aid your plans with all of my power," Amaris remarked softly.

She turned to walk away.

"Amaris!" Maeve called out and the dark-haired Fae obediently paused in her step. "Are you really that attached to him?"

Amaris cocked her head but didn't turn back.

"No," she answered. "I read that the parents separating or breaking apart can impair and damage the psychological welfare of the child. It would be unhealthy for me if he were to die."

"I see," Maeve murmured with a strange smile. "You and those books of yours..."

Amaris did not respond.

Amanda Carpenter sat in the corner of Dumbledore's office and felt like an idiot. Or, at least, that was what her Father and Professor Dumbledore would like to believe as they conversed quietly by the desk. Several wizards and witches crowded by them, some that Amanda recognised and others that she didn't. The first thing Daddy had done when she had regained consciousness was to take her aside. He didn't yell at her, something Amanda would have preferred. No, he had spoken to her in a deathly calm and disappointed voice. Amanda squirmed on her seat as guilt washed over her at the anguish on Daddy's face. He had look so torn and so tired.

Then, as the guilt and doubt began to creep in her mind, Amanda let out a small gasp and her lips parted in surprise. A deep, blazing fire swept through her, washing away her weaknesses and strengthening her resolve. The power, only a trickle, raged within her like a furious bonfire and Amanda was certain that she could hear a female voice in her head, murmuring something distantly.

Amanda felt her annoyance and anger rise and she glowered at the back of her father's head. Her blonde hair was ruffled and messy and it framed her tired face. Nevertheless, the sixteen year old witch didn't actually feel tired. In fact, if she had to say, she had never felt more alive or powerful in her entire life. The power within her, it was intoxicating. Her body felt different and she couldn't quite get the thick smell of sulphur out of her nose but- was this the power that of the Blackened Order? For a single moment, Amanda couldn't find fault with anybody seeking out this power.

She was distantly aware that what she was thinking was wrong, that she would never, ever think badly of her father and that the demon inside of her was changing her. That sudden realisation broke through to her and the sudden, almost maniacal grin on her face faded into a look of sorrow.

Both of her palms itched and burned. One of them was from when she had 'woken up' and discovered that she was clutching a glowing Sword of the Cross in her hand. The other was from the recently imprinted sigil that came with picking up a Denarian coin. She hesitantly lifted up her clenched hand and slowly unfurled her fingers.

There it was. Burned into the palm of her hand was a little sigil, three wavy lines surrounded by a jagged triangle. That little symbol could be responsible for the destruction of her soul. Hell, torment, and punishment. Amanda had taken hold of the one thing that would lead to everything she had been warned against her entire life. Was it worth it? The power felt great, but was it really worth what she had condemned herself to?

Harry Potter.

The words were whispered into her ears by that same female voice. Amanda had no doubt as to who it was. For her, Meciél was an almost indecipherable ghost, winking in and out of her consciousness. At any other time, Amanda might have been a little interested in knowing more about the Fallen. However, all of her tentative prods at the blazing pool of pure fire that nestled in the forefront of her mind had been met with a vast well of ancient fury. Meciél's anger was bubbling in her head with enough force to start an earthquake. Merely describing her mood as 'furious' at Harry's abduction was a severe understatement. Amanda was sure that Meciél could match any active volcanoes, both with her fire and with the way she wanted to explode.

Obviously, Meciél didn't want to talk at the moment. She was still right though.

Amanda blocked out the stirring for power that tingled beneath her skin and focussed her attention on her goal. She had picked up the coin to save Harry. There had been no other motive and there would be no other motive. Amanda smiled softly at the thought of the dark-haired perpetually grumpy wizard. At least she knew why he was such a little bastard during his childhood. With this power behind her, Amanda wasn't quite sure that she'd remain humble.

'My power only contributed somewhat. He was mostly a bastard because he enjoyed being on the top of the pyramid for a chance.'

Amanda flinched and looked around wildly. Her heart raced as she licked her lips, making sure that Professor Dumbledore and Daddy were still talking. Slowly, making sure to keep her lips as still as possible, Amanda whispered.

"Meciél?"

'I exist in your head, girl,' the voice said, disgust evident. 'Speak to me in there, lest your precious 'daddy' uses his sword to kill us.'

Amanda frowned, suddenly wary at the hostility she was facing. Her face scrunched up in concentration as she attempted to convey a silent message to Meciél. The Fallen merely sighed.

‘Speak into your head!’ she commanded. ‘There is no trick to it. Merely think the words and I will hear then.’ Meciél paused. ‘Perhaps you are just as stupid as Harry always claimed.’

‘Oh, shut up!’ Amanda thought. She folded her arms crossly. ‘I am not stupid. I just haven’t read ‘101 tips for the budding demon-host’ and oh my God, I sound like him with his metaphors.’

Amanda felt something...for lack of a better word...leak from Meciél’s enormous presence and it took her a few moments to decipher it as some kind of amusement or humour, albeit strained. She smiled herself.

‘Girl,’ Meciél said and Amanda nodded absently, unaware of keen eyes probing her every movement. ‘I will be truthful. I do not like you. I have never liked you. I believe that you are a bad influence on Harry, but he is free to make his own choices. After all, I am not as arrogant as the Almighty to demand total obedience without question.’

“Thanks,” Amanda muttered under her breath. “I feel better already.”

‘Work with me, mortal, and we will rescue Harry together,’ Meciél finished. ‘Our interaction need not last past that reunion. Give my coin to Harry and you shall be free of me. Of course, I can sense your motives. Give the coin to Harry and I will ensure that he will be healed and I will take him to safety.’

‘I know you will,’ Amanda thought firmly. ‘And that’s why I picked up the coin. Dumbledore likes Harry, I think, but I don’t know how much. Daddy might not go and save him. I picked you up because you were the only one who would go and rescue him.’

‘And how do you know that I would?’ asked Meciél, her voice quiet within her head.

‘Because...’

“Ms. Carpenter?”

Amanda shrieked and bolted up from her seat. She looked around frantically, spluttering incoherently as her concentration with Meciél was broken. Professor Dumbledore looked slightly startled by her strange behaviour but seemed amused if his twinkling eyes were anything to go by. Amanda blushed under his gaze and ducked her head.

"Professor," she muttered, suddenly feeling ashamed under the wise Professor's gaze. "I...I'm sor-"

"No," Professor Dumbledore interjected quietly. He placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "I am the one who must apologise. I have failed if one of my students had to resort to this to save a friend. I understand your choice completely. I too once made such a similar choice."

"It's not that bad, Professor," Amanda murmured sheepishly. "She's a bit cranky but she hasn't ripped out my soul yet."

'I have no need to take your soul for you have already given it to me,' Meciél spoke, sounding annoyed. 'I also have no desire for your precious little soul.'

"I see," Dumbledore murmured as he smoothed his beard.

He motioned behind him, where several of the witches and wizards were waiting patiently. Amanda recognised that the weird hair-coloured woman, Professor Moody and a tall dark-skinned man from the Department of Mysteries. Daddy and Sanya stood to the side, both broad-shouldered men looking grim. The rest, she didn't know.

"They have been partially briefed on the situation," he said quietly. "However, there are certain aspects of the tale that they do not know. I advise you not to mention Meciél at all. If you must speak of her, refer to her as our mutual friend or something along those lines. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," Amanda nodded quickly and eagerly. Excitement was brewing in her stomach. "Are we going to save Harry now?"

“In a few moments,” Dumbledore said, eyeing Amanda carefully. “I shall be blunt, Ms. Carpenter. I do not wish for you to partake in any of the fighting if you can help it. You and our mutual friend should seek out Harry as quickly and quietly as possible.”

“But...the sword...” Amanda protested. She motioned at the sword leaning up against the wall. “It...”

“...is a potent weapon, I agree,” Dumbledore interrupted solemnly. “But be it blade or wand, I have found that the most dangerous part of a weapon is the person holding it in their hands. You have not trained for this type of battle and I do not wish for you to be hurt.”

‘I agree with him. You are not there to take revenge. You are merely a vessel to bring me to my chosen host and nothing more. When you have found him, you will give him my vessel- the coin. That is your task.’

“Okay,” Amanda answered to the two of them. “I’ll find Harry and get the coin to him.”

Dumbledore looked at her sharply. Then, sighing, he adjusted his half-moon spectacles and nodded. He turned and went back to the group of wizards and witches, addressing them softly, while Amanda sighed and leaned back against the wall.

‘I should advise you,’ Meciél said after a few moments. ‘You are not to use your wand until I have left you. My innate power conflicts with traditional wand magic. It took Harry and me some years of experimenting before we could calibrate his wand so that it would channel Hellfire and magic simultaneously.’

“No magic?” Amanda asked incredulously, her eyes wide. “So what can I do?”

‘You will wield the Sword of the Cross,’ Meciél commanded. ‘I shall direct you. I have had many hosts who were proficient with a blade, Harry included. Your body is not built for it but it will do until we have found Harry.’

“Amanda?”

To her credit, she managed to regain her composure a little more gracefully this time as she jumped in her seat. Her father was standing before her, looking saddened. His eyes were sorrowful but he managed a weak smile as he ruffled her head.

“Ah! Geroff me!” protested Amanda, her face scrunching up as she shook her head in an attempt to dislodge the hand.

Michael smiled faintly, and then turned serious.

“Amanda,” he said quietly. “I need you to ask the...Fallen...within something for me.”

Amanda opened her mouth to respond and froze. Her lips weren't moving! Panic began to well within her as she felt Meciél's presence flare in her mind. The massive presence roared through her and Amanda suddenly felt so small and humble as Meciél expertly took control of her body. Out of its own accord, her mouth began to move.

“What is it, Knight?” Amanda heard herself speak in a cold voice. “I thought we had made our cases to each other quite clearly before. I shall rescue Harry and release your daughter unharmed. What else do you want to know?”

Michael stiffened at the words coming from his daughter's mouth. His dark eyes were sharp as flint as his hands were balled up into fists.

“What if you don't find him?” Michael asked quietly. “I want to know what will happen to my daughter if we can't find Harry or worse, if he is dead.”

Amanda screamed within her mind as a rush of liquid fire poured within her. Her vision burned at the brightness and power of the Hellfire and she quaked under the pressure of Meciél's complete and utter fury- and dread. She distantly felt her mouth open again.

"If that happens, then I shall take your daughter as my own. I will consume her soul and sharpen this body into a weapon. Then, I shall wreak a terrible vengeance against those who dare take that which was rightfully mine!"

"His life?" Michael asked.

"His soul."

In a sudden rush, Amanda felt control return to her as the liquid fire retreated from her veins as quickly as it had come. She let out a startled little cry of pain and sagged in her seat, her eyes widen with shock and surprise. That had...that was the wrath of a demon? Amanda shuddered as Daddy knelt down by her and gently hugged her. Amanda, with tears in her eyes, hugged him back and rested her head on his firm shoulder. At a moment like this, with her Daddy murmuring comforts into her ear and rubbing small soothing circles on her back, it was almost impossible to believe that she could die soon.

Then the sigil on her hand burned and Amanda stiffened. She reluctantly broke apart from her father and gazed up at him.

"I still don't regret it," she told him with a sad smile. "I really don't."

"Amanda," her Father sighed. "There's a fine line between love and...obsession. Don't you think you may have crossed it at one point?"

Amanda considered this.

"Maybe," she conceded even as she rubbed her eyes. "But, when I think about it like that, I find that I still don't care. Isn't that love?"

"Mr. Carpenter?" Professor Dumbledore called. Amanda and Michael looked up to see the rest of the wizards and witches waiting for them. "We're ready."

Amanda stood in front of a glowing slit that lay suspended in the air, her eyes wide with astonishment. Around her, many of the other

wizards and witches murmured in surprise. She wasn't the only one new to this then. That thought pleased her somewhat. She gripped the Sword of the Cross in her hands, the hilt bound with a strip of cloth to stop it from burning her, as Dumbledore spoke quietly to the magnificent bird on his shoulder.

"I believe that we have found him," Dumbledore told the group. "I need not remind you that Harry Potter is the most important person in the fight against Lord Voldemort. We simply cannot win without him."

Amanda saw a tall, gaunt man twitch at this, his frantic eyes burning with dread.

"I will lead the way," Dumbledore continued. "Remember what I have told you. The Conjunction and Transfiguration of iron objects will be your most potent weapon. If you are wounded, use the emergency portkey I have given you. It will take you back to the other side of this portal, where Filius and Arthur will be waiting for you."

Amanda saw Professor Flitwick say something quietly to a balding middle-aged red-haired wizard, the usual cheery Professor subdued.

"We must depart now," Dumbledore said and looked grim. "Good luck, my friends."

It was cold, windy and icy. They had stepped out of the portal into a veritable blizzard, complete with snow and rain. Dumbledore was leading the small group of rescuers away from the portal as they strode through the snow. The charms the Headmaster had placed on all of them really did help, but Amanda could feel her fingers beginning to go numb. There was nothing else he could, the aged wizard had said, without being detected by the very people they were trying to sneak up on. Ahead of her, Daddy and Sanya were leading the way, the silver glow of their swords readily visible against the white backdrop.

'Accursed Winter!' Meciél spat.

Amanda struggled against the snowstorm, her face twisted in a pensive frown. Something had occurred to her and she needed to

speak to the Fallen, no matter how much she just wanted to avoid the demon.

"You know," she said out loud, although her words were easily lost over the shrieking of wind. "Harry loves you."

'What?'

"He loves you," Amanda repeated, brushing snow off her hair. Her heart was pounding but she was determined to say her piece. "He told me, you know. He said that you were the only person he really loves."

'I know, you foolish little girl!'

"Back then, when you said his soul belonged to you, that wasn't the most important thing that the faeries took, is it?" Amanda continued.

'Harry was right,' Meciél said and Amanda was sure that there was a tone of bitterness in the other woman's voice. 'You never do shut up, do you?'

"See, I can feel you," Amanda continued strongly. "I can sort of feel what you feel. You're not furious that they've taken his soul away. You're furious that they've taken his heart away from you, because you think it's yours for eternity and you don't want to lose it."

'Is there a point to your ramblings?' It was hard to tell what Meciél was thinking.

"No, no point," Amanda murmured and shrugged. The wind was biting into her cheeks and she wasn't the only one affected as a tired-looking greying man with warm amber eyes helped shield the female with weird hair under his cloak. "I'm just happy that I was right."

'Right about what?' Meciél asked as the small group paused in their tracks. 'Right about who?'

"Everything and everybody," Amanda said and smiled in satisfaction. "It's nothing you need to worry about."

There was something happening at the front of the line and Amanda tried to peer forward through the snow. She could see Dumbledore speaking earnestly to a small figure- was that a faery? Yes, she was positive that it was. It was one of the little ones, with shaggy pink hair and an excitable little face. She felt Meciél jolt with recognition and felt the name seep into her consciousness.

Unconsciously, she opened her mouth and murmured "Cessbulby."

Dumbledore seemed to have come to a conclusion and gestured at the small Faery. She couldn't hear what he was saying over the roar of the snowstorm but the group turned and Amanda followed them as they began to trail after the small pink flow in the distance. Well, Amanda thought happily, it looked like that they had a tour guide.

A/N: Well, this has been a bloody long update. I think we can all agree on that. It's actually been up on DLP for a week but I got distracted and...kinda forgot. Luckily for you, Chapter 24 is done and awaiting feedback. If all seems well, it'll be up in a day or so. I've been very busy recently, since the end of university came and went and I started on work placement. Actually, I'm still there- I wrote this up in a couple of spares. I've also been working on the plot and details for an original series, 100 percent genuinely 'Shezza'. I've got a good background, a solid understanding of what to do in book 1, hazy ideas of books 2 and 3 and a long-term arc for future books. Hey, if all goes well then you could see my book in a bookstore in a couple of years- but probably not. I'm not THAT good.

But I'm still good enough to give you this chapter. Enjoy.

Harry was almost certain he had found something worse than the agonising physical and mental trauma that Maeve and Amaris were putting him through. He could feel himself hovering over his newly healed body, barely aware of the aches, pains and mind numbing weariness that he was feeling. It was nice, he had decided early on, this little mental trick that Meciél had showed him. It made the world seem like such a nicer place. Things were softer and brighter and there was always this white haze that seemed to linger in his vision the longer he stayed out. Meciél had warned him against fully embracing that light, which reminded him somewhat of the Imperius Curse that that Death Eater infiltrator had tried to put him under. It was so...soft. There was no warmth to it nor was there cold, just the tantalising prospect of everything ending.

Wait. What did he hate again? Ah, right, the boredom. Harry felt himself nod up and down. The boredom sucked as much as a whore in a brothel. His mental faculties paused and he could feel a slither of discontent. A whore at a brothel?

Well, it was better than nothing, he supposed.

It was only then that he became aware of his chapped lips moving and he stopped to peer down at his motionless, pale body. Oh, bugger, Harry thought with a growl- and saw his lips move with his thoughts, the 'oh, bugger' escaping from him in a flat, dead tone. He was doing that thing again, the thing where he verbalised what he thought and he thought what he verbalised. Harry would have frowned if he'd been more aware of his body and tried to speak.

Fuck you, Maeve, you skanky little bitch.

Harry saw his lips remain still and resisted the urge to dive back into his body, scowl, and come back out of it again. Okay, maybe Maeve had screwed him up just a little. It wasn't anything too bad, though. A bit of insanity never hurt anybody. Hey, look at Voldemort and Dumbledore. Both were regarded as the two most powerful wand-wizards in the world yet the former was a psychopathic retard who split up his soul and the other let a Denarian attend his school with bright, fresh and mostly innocent teenagers.

Except for the two Harry had once glimpsed during a make-out session in one of the closets. Those two were just little sluts.

Where had he been? Yeah. Maeve was not going to break him. Harry envisioned himself standing by Maeve's side as one of her pathetic little servants and his disgust was so strong that his body twitched, his expression twisting into a sneer. He'd rather go insane than bend on his knees. Well, actually, he was.

He giggled at that thought. At least his thoughts were more entertaining than the walls and ceiling of his prison. Harry made a note to let Maeve know that the whole ice-motif really wasn't working out for her. Sure, he understood that it was the Winter Court but day after day of staring at the same walls really impressed upon Harry the need for some variety. He'd do almost anything to see a normal, dull old brick wall again.

Everything except bow down to Maeve.

Harry envisioned Maeve lugging around a giant brick wall with a rope, smirking down at him with those Fae eyes and looking triumphant as

Harry fell to his knees and wept with joy. He couldn't help it and chuckled. In a split-second, his concentration had been split and Harry felt dismayed as his mind was yanked back to his cold and aching body. His hoarse, rough chuckle broke off into a low moan as Harry flipped over on the icy floor. Whoever had designed this cell had conveniently forgotten a bed and Harry was getting very tired of sleeping on a floor that was below subzero.

Silk sheets. Now, that was something that Harry could use. Yeah, silk sheets and one of those fluffy mattress protector things. A thick doona, stacks of pillows and silk sheets. Fuck everything else, Harry would strangle the Winter Lady herself and desecrate her corpse in a variety of twisted and wholly humorous ways for the chance to sleep on a nice bed.

He'd also do it for a dollar or a packet of chewing gum.

Harry was interrupted from his insightful musings as the ice beneath his body shuddered softly. He glanced down, his eyes suddenly alert and awake. There it was again, another shudder. There was a dull thump in the background and the ground shuddered again. Harry suddenly felt his mind become as sharp as a blade, his emerald eyes suddenly alive as they darted back and forth the room.

"Well now," he said to himself. He smiled viciously, baring bloodied teeth as anger, relief, sadness, anticipation, and most importantly, hope, filled him until it felt like it would explode from his veins from the sheer force he was feeling. "It's about fucking time, Meciél."

Amanda trawled through the snow, kept afloat only by a few select charms, which faded the longer she remained in the snow, and an addictive, searing fire that surged through her veins. The older wizard had led them through the swarms, cutting through swathes of blanketing snow with mere swishes of his wand. The little faery, Cessbulby, had been nothing more than a soft glow in the distance as Amanda and the rest of the would-be rescuers trudged through the bitter snowstorm of Winter. Dumbledore had led the way and eventually they had come across a large, foreboding fortress that seemed to be made entirely of different shades of ice.

Amanda had to admit that the ice motif that Winter had was starting to get annoying, especially when it she had to rely on Meciél to keep her body warm.

‘I have a question,’ Amanda thought in her head. Meciél didn’t say anything but she didn’t shoot Amanda down either, which the blonde took to be a promising sign. ‘If you can make some of the cold go away, then why can’t you make it all go away? I’m freezing!’

‘Do you wish to die, little girl?’ Meciél’s response was derisive and Amanda was once again reminded just how much the Fallen really seemed to dislike her. ‘My perception of the world comes from you and your senses. The human body feels pain for a reason. If I switched it all off, then how would either of us know if your toes were about to fall off?’

“Alright, alright,” murmured Amanda, her voice unheard over the howling winds around her. “It was just a question.”

‘Take the energy you have in asking inane questions and use it to continue walking forward,’ Meciél suggested. ‘Our beloved awaits us, most likely in great pain. I need to find him.’

‘Our beloved?’ Amanda thought in surprise.

A dark chuckle echoed around her head and Amanda’s skin tingled and she shivered from something totally unrelated to the cold weather around them. The Fallen stopped laughing and something brushed by her ear, as if Meciél was leaning down to whisper something into it.

‘I know your mind and soul, forsaken one,’ Meciél said quietly. ‘I know your heart, too. Harry Potter is precious to you.’

Amanda wouldn’t have been surprised if the heat from her cheeks started to melt the ice and snow around her. She was glad nobody around her could see her as she instinctively ducked her head in embarrassment. Then, Meciél continued and her voice became softer.

'Don't worry. Harry is precious to me, also. We will find and rescue him from his hell. Then, perhaps as a reward, I shall give him to you and he can be yours- if only for a night.'

Amanda took that in and wrinkled her nose in disgust. Still, something passed through her and her skin tingled at the very thought of what Meciél was suggesting.

"I don't know who's worse," she concluded out loud. "You, for trying to whore Harry out, or me for thinking about saying yes."

'It must be my evil influence on you,' Meciél said blandly.

Amanda was surprised with herself when she chuckled.

"You know," she said lightly, rubbing her hands together to try to regain some feeling within them. "You're pretty funny."

'Sh. Don't tell anybody.'

"You're not all that bad, are you?" Amanda asked just a tad wistfully. "Maybe I've been wrong all of this time."

'I'd kill you in a heartbeat,' Meciél said with absolute certainty. 'Never doubt that.'

"Maybe," Amanda conceded as Dumbledore approached one of the walls of the fortress, his robes flapping and billowing out in the fierce winds. "I'm just saying that you're not the absolute evil of evil that daddy always said you were. He always tried to save the humans who took up your coins but he always hated the demons inside of them."

'Please.' Meciél's voice sound just a tad pained. 'Refer to me as a Fallen. I have very little in common with those spawn.'

"Well, I..." Amanda trailed off as Dumbledore halted just beyond the looming ice-covered wall.

The aged wizard was conversing with the little faery Cessbulby, who was buzzing around furiously. She couldn't hear what the Headmaster told their little guide but the faery zoomed off in what seemed to be a huff. Dumbledore withdrew his wand and held it loosely. Amanda could barely see through the whirling snow as his blurred figure swished his wand, but a wave of warmth came over her and suddenly Dumbledore's authoritative voice whispered into her ear.

'This is the place where Harry Potter is being kept captive. I am about to attempt to breach the walls. If I am successful, we can expect our unexpected arrival to be greeted with hostility. Remember that iron is your best weapon. Work in your groups and look out for each other.'

Then, as an afterthought,

'Ms Carpenter, you must find Harry. When found, you should hand over the artefact immediately. Then, you must do your best to convince him to leave. I do not think he will take his imprisonment lightly and, with his benefactor granting him back his most formidable weapons, I believe that his first act will be to take immediate revenge.'

Amanda thought about Harry and reviewed all that she knew about his qualities and temperament and shuddered. Oh yeah, Harry was going to be very pissed off- as long as he was capable of it. Both Daddy and Meciél had filled her in on what they knew about the Fae and Amanda had winced at Harry being under that sort of tender loving care. Privately, she prayed that Harry was still Harry and not some kind of drone. If he was, then Amanda didn't know what she could do.

'If that is the case then I shall take care of it,' Meciél murmured. 'There is no Fae enchantment that I cannot break.'

Amanda smiled.

"You better," she said.

She could feel Meciél doing the mental equivalent of watching her speculatively but she ignored the Fallen and turned her eyes back to Dumbledore. The powerful wizard was tapping the giant wall with his wand, rubbing his beard and seemingly muttering to himself. Amanda caught little flashes of golden sparks seeping into the icy wall from the tip of his wand. Dumbledore turned back to the small group of wand-wizards and Knights as they huddled around him, looking bedraggled, grim and tired.

“We are almost there, my friends,” he said gravely.

Amanda tuned him out as she turned to survey the great walls of Maeve’s fortress. Meciél was quiet but the blonde could feel the Fallen drawing her anger together, slithers of potent Hellfire escaping into Amanda’s veins. She could only marvel at the feeling, which was almost indescribable. The Hellfire burned. It seared her vulnerable flesh and cooked her bones. At the same time, it was a good type of pain- the best type of pain- and Amanda could see why some people chose to keep their coins without being completely dominated by the Fallen that came with it.

Oh, and the ones that didn’t fall in love with them either.

Meciél tinged with annoyance and Amanda smirked. She chose not to attempt to understand how something in her mind could tinge and how she could perceive it. Instead, she took a step back as Dumbledore finished talking with his ‘troops’ for lack of a better word. Daddy and Sanya remained motionless as they withdrew their swords, silver light beginning to sparkle in the glinting steel blades. Amanda felt her own blade begin to heat on the scabbard across her back and winced as painful lances of heat pierced through her school robes, sending throbbing pinpricks down her back,

On one hand, Amanda felt pained that the powers that her father had served for so long would hurt her when all she was trying to do was to save its previous owner. On the other hand, she felt almost vindicated in her decision to pick up the coin. The fact that the sword had only lit up after her decisions meant that, in some small way, things were going the way they were meant to.

Why else would Meciél, a Fallen, be a Knight of the Cross?

Dumbledore was done with his spellwork, Amanda noticed, and she lifted her wand. A tingle of excitement seeped through the sudden heaviness of dread that weighed down her heart yet she remained resolute and determined. She had come too far to back down now.

Dumbledore was concentrating, his brow furrowed and his eyes closed. Amanda allowed the Hellfire to roar through her and an almost manic smile lit up her face as the power surged through her, better than adrenaline on any day. Her gloved hand drifted up to her back, fingers briefly caressing the burning hilt of the Sword of the Cross. She waited anxiously as Dumbledore remained motionless for what seemed like hours.

Finally, the old man opened his eyes, opened his mouth and spoke.

Amanda's eyes widened and for a split-second it was as if every sensation in her body had suddenly left her. She felt light-headed and woozy. She wasn't the only one as everybody around her, even Sanya and her Daddy, staggered or stumbled. Dumbledore's voice hung in the air, a strange and bizarre word hanging there, and then everything came rushing back into her.

At the same time, the looming wall of ice glowed in the same colour that Dumbledore's previous spellwork had been. Something unseen but practically radiating sheer and utter force slammed into it and the world wavered. With an intense flash of light, the air filled with ozone and the ground rocked with thunder. Amanda clasped her hands over her ears and let out an unheard cry of shock as the icy wall bulged and exploded outwards in a shower of coloured ice.

The fortress grumbled and Amanda looked up, her eyes wide with shock as one of the towering spiked spires shuddered. Large cracks shot through the delicate-looking structure as it collapsed and fell upon the roof of the fortress. She turned her head back to Dumbledore, who was gingerly massaging his throat with a hard look in his normally-cheerful eyes and gaped.

"That. Was. Awesome!" she gushed.

Meciel snorted. 'Harry can do that too,' she muttered. 'Though, to amplify the reverberations of a Word and manipulate it in such a way- Albus is indeed an intelligent one.'

"Go, go, go!" the dark-skinned man shouted and the Order withdrew their wands and poured into the dark hole that Dumbledore had just blasted into the foreboding fortress. Amanda didn't need to be told twice and Meciel loomed to the forefront of her mind as she attached herself to her father's group and ducked into the hole with them.

Harry had a small problem. It was about three feet tall and carried a very sharp stick.

Well, there were three of them, these little gnarled and wrinkled goblins and they were holding spears rather than sticks. They stood around his cell, sometimes pacing around nervously. He stared at them with a sneer on his face, doing his best to intimidate them as he stood upright and allowed a terrible smile to cross his face.

"Do you hear that?" He said, his voice barely a whisper yet reaching into the fearful goblins. He cocked his head and listened. "I hear Faeries dying."

One of the goblins twitched.

"Little faeries, big faeries, strong faeries, weak faeries- all dead," Harry murmured quietly. "Killed by the massive army that's come to rescue me."

One of the goblins spat and glared at him with its beady little eyes. Apart from a few scraps of cloth and the spear made of obsidian the goblin was naked and Harry grimaced and glanced away.

"Dude, you need to get some fucking clothes on," he muttered. "I've seen disembowelled and flattened road kill that looked better than you." He sniffed the air. "They smelt better too."

The goblin spat something out at him in its native tongue.

“What?” Harry asked. He cocked his head and grinned mischievously. “I dun’ speak, ya?”

The goblin said something again and Harry frowned. He leaned forward, closer to the bars of his cell. The goblin growled angrily and slammed the butt of his spear into the icicle-like bars. He spat something out rudely while Harry continued to look oblivious. One of the other goblins let out a sigh and muttered something under its breath to the third guard in its high-pitched growls and clicks. The guard talking to Harry whirled its head around and retorted with a couple of unknown words that Harry could already guess was the goblin equivalent to ‘fuck you’.

The moment the guard turned his head, Harry pounced.

The little beast didn’t even get a chance to scream as Harry swung his arms around the solid ice, wrapped his hands around the little goblin’s frail neck and squeezed. It gurgled and choked as the other two goblins sprang to action. Harry, his heart pounding and his anger too great to back off now, thrashed the goblin in his grasp back and forward, smashing its head into the bars over and over again. He dropped its limp body, grabbed its spear and pulled it back into the cage just in time to parry a vicious stab.

These little bastards were going to die!

In many ways, this was Amanda’s first battle. Sure, she had been involved in the battle of the Department of Mysteries, where she had pitted her skills against those of fully-skilled Death Eaters. But, even in her worst fight where she had summoned the uncontrollable Fiendfyre and taken her first blood, she had never experienced something like this.

The hole had led straight to a large foyer-like room. Glittering ice pillars loomed up from the ground, holding a shelf of ice up to act like a roof. Minerals and crystals, only distinguishable from icicles by their colour, jutted out from the walls. They glowed with soft, beautiful pulses of light that shone throughout the room. It was very beautiful, Amanda had noticed, and she would have been enthralled by it all if it weren’t for the smell. Winter was strong here and to somebody like

Amanda, host of a Knight and a Fallen, she could literally smell the tang of death and decay. Winter was cold and beautiful but it brought along death in nature. This was easily apparent to Amanda as her pert nose wrinkled, but the newest Denarian host had little time to complain as Meciél's presence wrapped around her mind and body and guide her movements.

There were yells and shouts from all around her as Wizards and monsters battled each other. Blasts of light and inhuman screeches of agony and anger assaulted her from all directions as the wizards, led by Albus Dumbledore, moved to engage the monsters of the Winter Court. Amanda spotted her father in all of the chaos, his broadsword swinging with the power of an axe and the subtlety of a rapier as he felled creature after creature, dark blood staining the glowing steel.

She couldn't look long as Meciél moved her head to the side, casually avoiding the razor-sharp talons of this winged bat-woman creature thing. Amanda moved her arms up, Meciél making minute adjustments to the direction and force behind her muscles, and swung her sword at it. The tip of the glowing blade slashed a line through the chest of the creature and it screeched in agony as silver fire leapt from Amanda's sword and enveloped it in a cocoon of light.

Amanda stepped back and instinctively lifted a wand- Harry's wand. The runes on the piece of holly glowed, allowing the raw and potent Hellfire to rush through it and amplify the curse building within it.

"Effodio!" She screamed. Power built within her and her arm buckled as a flash of silver light, far more potent than what she could produce on her own, blasted out. It was also more shaky and unrefined than what she was used to and the silver light exploded on the ground and ripped up ice metres short of its target.

The glowing-eyed dog growled and lunged at her. Meciél took over and Amanda felt herself whirl around, her sword automatically coming up and hastily bashing the vicious dog on the side of its head. It whined, its leg's buckling, and collapsed. Amanda took a deep breath, lifted the blade over her head and brought it down on the Winter Fae, ending its life.

Amanda took a moment to take a breath. Her limbs were shaky and there were several scratches from careless talons and the occasional falling piece of glittery ice as the roof shuddered. Still, she was grinning widely as adrenaline, amped up considerably by Hellfire, surged through her, making her feel more alive and powerful than she had ever felt before.

‘Do you like it?’ Meciél murmured into her ears. Something long and silky brushed the back of her neck and Amanda could have sworn she felt a soft hand on her head. ‘Do you see the power we offer? Can you fault Harry for wanting to keep this? Can you fault anybody? Different people have different beliefs and desires but, in the end, there is not a single human being who can honestly say that this is not enjoyable.’

“It doesn’t mean that it’s right,” Amanda panted reluctantly

‘Human opinion on what is right and wrong changes so often and quickly throughout the years that I have not even bothered to keep track,’ Meciél scoffed. ‘Remember this, little daughter. That which was wrong yesterday is right today and will be wrong tomorrow. A time may come when becoming a host is considered to be one of the holiest of acts.’

Amanda couldn’t argue with her- mostly because she had to throw herself to the side to avoid a weird bolt of greenish crackling energy thrown by a haughty and extremely beautiful man. The High Sidhe, the most powerful type of Winter Fae that looked just as human as she did, gazed down at her disdainfully as Amanda struggled up, her eyes burning. She was ready to lash out at him with both magic and sword when the Fae’s eyes widened and he was yanked away as if something strong and invisible had just taken hold of him. Amanda felt surprised and gazed across the battlefield as Dumbledore turned away, his robes swaying gently amidst the chaos.

If there was anybody holding back the might of the surprised Winter garrison, it was Albus Dumbledore. Amanda watched as he defended the Order and wreaked havoc on his enemies alike. He moved slowly but deliberately, every wand movement a calculated action to

produce the most desired result. Magic hummed around him as a centaur twice as big as Dumbledore charged at him. Dumbledore flicked his wand and the half-man beast was felled just as easily as if he had been swatting a fly. Then, from the other side of the battlefield, there was a cold and high-pitched laughter and Dumbledore paused.

Coming from out of the door and surrounded by large, beefy-looking trolls were two very beautiful women. The first Amanda recognised as the Lady Maeve, a beautiful and seductive teenager that looked to be her own age. She was dressed in blue and silver silks that signified her status as royalty amongst the Winter court. The second was slightly younger dark-haired girl with green eyes and a blank expression wearing a very familiar white dress- albeit a bit larger than she remembered. Amanda recognised her as Amaris and her gut twisted in pain.

This was the little girl that Amanda remembered from Hogwarts. Harry had been very vague about his business with the Winter court but she had never suspected that Amaris had been his daughter until Meciél had told her.

Meciél had also told her that it was Amaris who had led that attack on Harry. His own flesh and blood had attacked him, ruthlessly exploiting Harry's hesitance to hurt her and capturing him for the twisted desires of Maeve- her mother, as Amanda had found out. It hurt even to think about what Harry must have been feeling.

"Albus Dumbledore," the Lady Maeve greeted, a wicked smile curving her perfect lips. "You were foolish to come here."

"Lady Maeve," Dumbledore greeted courteously. He bowed his head. "How could I not, when you extended such a....insistent...invitation."

"We have old business to finalise, you and I," Maeve spoke and rage twisted her features. "I see that pathetic song-bird has not accompanied you. Good."

"Yes, well, Fawkes can be rather fussy," Dumbledore said airily. "I did not see the need to bother her for this small matter."

“Always the funny one,” Maeve murmured and looked wistful. “Ah, Albus. We could have been very good friends if you’d only let me in.”

“Winter is cold and cruel,” Dumbledore responded quietly. “Summer is just as inhuman, yes, but they are better at hiding it. I chose them for those qualities, even if it was only for my peace of mind. Besides, Fawkes aided me in my most dire time of need. Refusing her would have been difficult.”

Maeve was quiet for a few minutes and Amanda absently summoned large gouts of fire to attack a new group of little goblins surrounding her, the spell flowing out of her as easily as breathing. Then, Maeve smiled- a cruel and nasty smile.

“It’s a pity that Harry isn’t ready yet,” Maeve said lightly. “You see, I knew you would come. I know of the circumstances that surround the boy and how important he is to your cause. I had hoped to have him greet you here, standing by my side, but he’s been delayed. Allow me to offer my apologies.”

Maeve lifted her hand and Amanda shielded her eyes from an intense flash of light. The air howled and little bits of snow slapped at her cheeks. It was as if she were standing outside again in the very worst of the snowstorm. She could barely make out Dumbledore struggling against the raging snow before a blast of golden light burst out from the ceiling and Fawkes swooped down. The bird trilled, Dumbledore regained himself and the snow became a raging tsunami of water, which the Headmaster directed at Maeve with a swish of his wand.

“Kill the bird, daughter,” Maeve shouted gleefully. “Dumbledore is mine!”

‘We need to move!’ Meciél shouted in Amanda’s mind as the two powers clashed. Amanda felt the Fallen focussing on an exit near to them. ‘If Cessbulby is correct, then Harry is down there.’

“Harry,” Amanda breathed, even as the air became stifling hot and bright, golden fire lashed out from Fawkes. Amaris dodged it nimbly and responded with a volley of icy arrows, which the bird merely soared over.

'This way!'

Finally, Amanda turned around and fled.

"Why...won't...you...fuck...off?" Harry grunted in exertion as he attempted to fend off the third goblin, the second gripped tightly in his grasp.

The little bastard could thrash and was squealing madly, slamming arms and legs into Harry's vulnerable stomach and thighs. At the same time, his partner was thrusting and stabbing his spear at Harry, who could only do his best to parry and block it with the broken shaft that he had taken from the first dead corpse. Obsidian clashed against the wooden shaft and Harry growled when he heard the first sounds of wood splintering.

He was tired and his entire body ached. His brain screamed at him to sit down and sleep (Maeve had been using a variety of sleep-deprivation techniques on him recently) but he pressed on, ignoring a vicious kick to his gut with well-practised ease and trying to slam the thrashing goblin into the bars.

The other goblin yelled something and Harry grunted as the spear slipped past his guard, tearing through the skin on his arm. Harry growled, his anger rising, and used the splintered and broken shaft of wood to lock the spear in place. The goblin pulled with all of his might and Harry grinned coldly as blood trickled down his arm and his mind silently screamed in agony.

Then, Harry caught sight of a flickering silver glow from behind the goblin, coming from the passage that led out of his dim, frost-covered cell. The glow became brighter and brighter as Harry struggled some more against his guards, finally letting the second one go and yanking the spear out of his arm. His relief was evident and he practically beamed as the glowing silver sword came into view. His smile turned into a surprised look when he noticed who it was, though.

"Amanda?"

“Harry?”

“Geth’korckik!”

Harry watched, completely stunned as Amanda moved gracefully, far more gracefully than he remembered. She twirled to the side, avoiding the goblin’s spear, and the sword lashed out. One of the goblins shrieked and toppled over as its rags fell off its body in a splatter of blood. The last goblin furiously charged at her, but the new Knight calmly waited and then kicked out with a foot, delivering a surprisingly vicious kick to its ugly and wrinkled little face.

“Phew,” Amanda uttered as she blew a strand of blonde hair out of her eyes. Her face was red with exertion and she was sweating as blood trickled off the tip of the Sword of the Cross.

Harry had never seen anything more beautiful.

“Do you have...is she...” Harry began hoarsely and fell silent.

Amanda turned to him and smiled hesitantly. She scanned his form and then blushed, obviously looking for injuries or wounds. Harry knew he looked quite healthy, because Maeve hadn’t wanted him to die too quickly on her, but his naked form apparently had an effect on the girl as she quickly turned around, looking mortified.

“What, never seen a penis before?” Harry cut in rudely.

“I...you...what...” Amanda began. She paused, her eyes widening, and she whirled around as somebody slunk out from the shadows. “Who are you?”

Harry regarded the newcomer with hostility, his teeth grinding. It was a tall, slim and inhumanly beautiful woman. Her pale skin sparkled under the light of the glowing crystal and her red tresses shimmered down her back. Her feline-slanted eyes regarded Amanda with faint amusement but her lip curled in disdain.

“Who am I?” The woman repeated. “No, who are you? Who are you to invade the home of my lady with bared steel?”

Harry watched, his hands clenched and trembling by his sides. Something niggled in the back of his mind at the sight of this high sidhe. He had seen her before, he was sure of it. Wasn't she that commander or general that had been fighting the invading army that Harry had plucked Maeve and Amaris out of all those months ago?

"I'm going to let Harry out," Amanda spat out angrily. Harry saw the sword flare up with her determination and, for the first time in his life, felt no pain from the presence of the holy light. "If you try to stop me, I'll...I'll...I'll kill you"

Way to sound convincing, brat, Harry thought wryly. He took a slow step backward, his eyes flickering to the broken shard of obsidian on the ground by his foot. The sidhe commander paid no attention to him as she withdrew her blade with obvious relish, bluish-black ice gleaming menacingly. Amanda straightened up and adopted a posture that even Harry could see was full of holes.

"You should not have come, mortal," the Fae spoke quietly. "My Lady is not renowned for her mercy. You will suffer unimaginable hells when..."

Harry moved as a blur, spurring his tired muscles into action. He kicked the broken spearhead up, caught it in his hand and spun around as he left it go. The Fae moved as a blur, her sword flying up and batting the projectile away. She lifted her hand and Harry felt the freeing power of Winter around him, sapping his strength and hurling him aside. He landed on the ground painfully and grunted. When he looked up again, Amanda had already moved into action.

Silver fire burned from the Sword of the Cross and Harry watched in amazement as Amanda duelled with the humanlike Sidhe with skills that he had never seen on her before. Slicing the goblins apart had been one thing but the parries and blows that Amanda dealt out were just as good as his own had been. He watched as Amanda spun around, silver fire lashing out at the Fae who jumped backwards and summoned a fist of glowing green power. Fae magic blasted forward and deflected harmlessly off the holy blade. Amanda responded with a

powerful, if clumsy, one-handed blow and pulled out a very familiar wand.

She spoke; “Effodio!” and the walls shuddered as a roaring noise filled the room. A blast of chaotic magic writhed and twisted madly as it flew toward the Fae, wild and uncontrolled yet so terribly potent. The room filled with the sickly and tantalising smell of sulphur as the curse crashed against the bars of Harry’s prison and dissipated. When Amanda spun around, Harry saw that her eyes were wreathed in flame and he collapsed loosely against the wall of his cell.

Meciel.

Meciel was in Amanda. Amanda was Meciel’s host? What had happened? Harry’s mind almost came to a halt and he couldn’t even begin to describe what he was feeling as the most logical scenario came to mind. Amanda, the daughter of a Knight of the Cross and a devout Christian, had picked up the silver denarius of a Fallen angel. The irony was not lost on him. He almost sniggered as he pulled himself back up off the ground, idly wondering if Amanda had taken the coin willingly or if Meciel had lured her in unsuspectingly. It didn’t matter. In the end, Meciel was here.

Unfortunately, she was trapped in Amanda and while Harry could see that Meciel was utilising the new body to the best of her ability- evident in Amanda’s sudden progress in the sword arts- it was also easily apparent that Amanda was not as powerful as he had been. Sweat beaded on her forehead and her muscles were visibly straining against her robes as the Fae glided around her gracefully, delivering quick and sharp slashes and stabs with great skill. Harry knew from experience that it took some time for a Fallen to ‘upgrade’ the human body, so Amanda’s muscles must have been burning with pain.

Finally, after another short bout of sword fighting, Amanda backpedalled rapidly while Harry stood in his cell, eying the Fae with nothing short of pure hatred and unable to help. Amanda’s wand came up again and the Fae tensed her palm flying up. Water condensed, froze and lengthened, a set of sharpened icicles hovering over her hand. Amanda levelled the wand and Hellfire burned in her eyes as she screamed out an incantation that made Harry flinch.

“Shit.”

The icicles blasted from the Fae’s hands but were utterly consumed as a wave of dirty fire and heat raged from the tip of Amanda’s wand. Uncontrolled Fiendfyre roared and consumed everything in its path as it raced towards the Fae, who backpedalled swiftly as her face showed her fear. Sulphur filled the air as the Fiendfyre began to consume everything around it, filling the room with dangerous cursed flame. Harry watched with gritted teeth as the fire licked at the bars of his cell! sapping the strength of the powerful enchantments.

“Good work, moron!” Harry roared in anger and with no little fear. Fiendfyre- uncontrolled Fiendfyre especially- could destroy almost everything given enough time. For him, trapped in his little cell with no way out, it was almost a death sentence.

He peered through the bars as smoke and steam began to fill the room, attempting to see past the flames and the rising mist as ice turned to water turned to vapour. A wave of heat rolled over his unprotected skin and he could feel his body begin to blister. There was no way- wait! Something dark loomed within the flames and rushed towards him. Then, silver fire broke past the Fiendfyre and Amanda appeared before him, her eyes wild

“Harry!” she shouted over the cracking of the ice and the hissing noise of boiling water. “Catch!”

She drew back her head, her cheeks bulging, and spat something at him. A silver coin glinted in the air as it soared past the Fiendfyre and the bars. Harry’s eyes widened and he jumped up, his heart racing and adrenaline surging in his veins. He opened his mouth and the silver coin slapped against the back of his throat. Harry landed back on the ground and swallowed, a wide grin beginning to cross his face.

She was back.

Time slowed down. A massive surge of power rocked through him and his vision turned to white as precious Hellfire roared in fury and might. His aches and pains disappeared and his mind cleared for first

time in a very long time. Harry let out a gasp and closed his eyes as Meciél's blazing presence re-entered his mind, filling a nook with her vast and ancient self that had felt empty and unused since they had split. He couldn't help it and Harry began to giggle in absolute glee as emotions and thoughts passed between the two of them much quicker than any conversation. Something softly touched his head and he opened his eyes to see Meciél's illusion standing before him, her face creased with worry and joy as she drew him into a hug, both mentally and physically- as physical as an illusion can get, anyway. Hellfire surged through him again and Harry laughed as the power filled every pore of his body.

The reunion only took a matter of seconds but to Harry and Meciél, it felt like a lifetime since he had felt Meciél's embrace. Amanda watched on as Harry, still laughing, used his new-found power and shattered the manacles attached to his ankles. Two long white wings of bone lashed out from his naked back and swept aside the bars of the prison as if they were made of paper. Harry strolled out from his cell as a free man for the first time in who-knew-how-many weeks, his eyes wild and his mood triumphant. Fiendfyre roared around him and Harry avoided it carefully.

"Harry!" Amanda breathed from beyond the flames, the silver fire warding off the cursed flame. "You're okay!"

Harry smirked and turned to face the Fae, who had regained her bearings and was delicately avoiding the fire around her. The redhead glowered at the two of them with spiteful hatred and lifted her blade. Harry's wings lanced forward and bone clanged against ice as she blocked it. Amanda took a deep breath and joined him, charging into the Fiendfyre recklessly and reappearing on the other side without so much as a blister. She lifted the sword and hacked at the Fae with amateurish skill as Harry drew back his wings.

Together, the two fought side by side. Staggering under the weight of his weakened body, Harry's movements were slow, lacking his usual finesse. Yet, there was power behind his blows that sent the Fae woman reeling. He attacked her ferociously, ignoring small cuts and swipes that she gifted his reddened skin as Hellfire enhanced his sorely-lacking muscles. Amanda attacked from a different angle,

moving with a lot less skill and dexterity, almost to the point of uselessness. Without Meciél, she was an amateur- yet one protected by the divine. Every time it seemed as if the Fae was about to deliver a fatal blow Amanda would simply not be there. It was uncanny in the way that it happened, her clumsiness and awkwardness saving her many a time from death. Her divine luck made every one of her feeble attempts to attack a critical move, where the next three blows would be sudden and surprising to the point that the Fae must have found utterly bizarre.

Finally, it was over. A clumsy blow from Amanda shattered the Fae's icy blade in two and Harry moved in quickly, his wings coming up and puncturing both of the Fae's knees. She screamed and collapsed to the ground, defenceless. Harry loomed above her, his eyes shadowed as he sneered down at her. He brought his wings down, impaling her and snuffing her life out without a second thought.

Amanda watched him anxiously even as the sword glowed in her hand as he approached her. Fire roared around them as he stopped before her, regarding her with seriously. His body was blistering as the heat availed him from all sides but Amanda could already see the rapid healing that the presence of Meciél brought along taking effect.

"Here," was all the girl could say as she offered him something.

Harry recognised it as his wand and took it gratefully. Turning he frowned as he concentrated, drawing his will upon the Fiendfyre that raged around them. Slowly, but surely, the fires receded, leaving a much larger cavern of ice full of puddles of boiling water and steam. Harry eyed his wand with marvel, feeling more confident and secure that he had felt for a long time. He held it to his side loosely as he stared at Amanda with an expression that she had never seen before- gratitude. Amanda couldn't help but blush, especially given his close proximity and nakedness. Harry cleared his throat awkwardly as Amanda stared up at him and then gave her a pointed look.

"I know I have the whole 'bloodied' and 'roguish' look going for me, but you really shouldn't stare," he chided mockingly, a silly little grin on his face. He paused as he saw his reflection in the ice that

surrounded them and whistled. "Okay, maybe you can. Damn, I look really good. See how there's only a cut and a line of blood on my head. That way no bruises deter people from my pretty face."

"Harry..." Amanda started pityingly but Harry ignored her as he strode to the tunnel and glanced down it. The sounds of battle were faint but still obvious to him and he felt a rush of excitement and an almost immeasurable surge of fury fill his entire body.

He had his wand. Meciél was back. Oh yes, things were looking up.

"It sounds like people are waiting for us," Harry declared and his smile turned feral. "Let's not keep them waiting. First though, I'm gonna need to use this..."

He reached for the sword and then hissed in pain as it flared with light. The silver fire lashed out at him with an almost unnatural eagerness, burning him like it had never burned him before. Harry stared at his blackening hand in surprise, grateful for when Meciél began to heal the damage even as she worked over other areas of his body.

"What was that?"

"What...the...who...huh?" Harry uttered. He groaned. "Have I been replaced already?"

Amanda flinched as the realisation hit her.

"Wait," she began in disbelief. "Are you saying that I'm a..."

"Figures," Harry grunted as Amanda trailed off. He glanced upwards. "Couldn't you have waited until I'd carked it before you pawned off all my shit?"

"Sorry?" Amanda questioned in confusion, still feeling dazed. "I didn't mean it?"

"No matter," Harry said in his manically cheerfully way. "I'll just do it the old fashioned way."

“Um...Harry?” Amanda asked and pulled out her own wand. She focussed and conjured up a plain old brown robe for him to wear. “Maybe you should put that on first?”

“Oh, right. Right, right, right, right, right,” Harry exclaimed rapidly.

He quickly dressed himself and Amanda could see that he was literally bouncing up and down on his feet. She remembered what Dumbledore had said and opened her mouth once she could look at him again (although there were certain parts of him that she wouldn't be forgetting anytime soon) when Harry spun around and clasped her shoulders.

“Er...”

“Amanda,” Harry said seriously. Raw emotion boiled in his eyes as he stared down at her with gratitude. “I have never been happier to see anybody than I was to see you. Thanks.”

“It was...” Amanda started.

She broke off with a squeal as Harry bent his head down and mashed his lips against hers in a rough, smacking kiss. Feelings exploded within her and her legs trembled. She was barely aware when he stopped and grinned down at her with manically twinkling eyes.

“Well, gotta go,” he exclaimed manically. “Try to keep up, would you?”

“Wait, what?”

Amanda shook her head dazedly and tried to protest as Harry sprinted from the room and entered the tunnel that would eventually take him back to the main hall- and the battle. She stared after him for a few moments, trying to take in everything that had just happened. Then, a scowl appeared on her face.

“Shit!” she cursed and started on after him.

A/N: Hey guys. I told you that this one wouldn't take too long. It's almost double my normal word count, so it did take a tad longer than I predicted. This was really fun to write and even more fun to touch up. There was a bit of debate at DLP on a few scenes in here, and I've cleaned up a lot of them, but there's some I'm leaving the way it is because- frankly- it reads cool. I haven't started 25 but I have a month off starting last week, so I wanna get a lot of DL done before I go back to uni. Enjoy, and feel free to leave your thoughts.

Albus Dumbledore could feel his chest heaving as he slowly walked towards his enemy, a slow and steady pace that revealed nothing of his weariness. The Winter Lady Maeve, young in body and ancient in mind, continued to smirk at him as she raised a pale arm. Albus tensed, his grip on his wand tightening just a tad as he awaited Maeve's next barrage of Fae power.

"Did anybody ever tell you that you are extremely annoying?" Maeve questioned, crackling bolts of greenish energy not that too dissimilar to a killing curse flickering around her fingers.

"Quite often, yes," Albus replied breezily. "Alas, such as the curse of old age, though, I suppose you would know all about that, hmm?"

Maeve's face became ugly and affronted and Albus chuckled, even as the Winter Lady hurled coils of deadly power at him. He spun on his feet, magic flowing through his slender wand, and a net of blue light spread out around him. The power struck at it and recoiled, dissipating in a foggy mist of green. Albus allowed his charm to drop and smiled none-too-nicely at his beautiful opponent.

"Fae or not, I see that all women dislike talking about their age," Albus murmured, stroking his beard as a slight distraction.

His hardened eyes casually assessed the situation around him, noting Order member and Fae monster battling each other. The order members were clumped on one side back to back, using the transfiguration and conjuration of solid iron to draw their enemies down a single path, where they would meet a deadly barrage of

powerful curses. The Headmaster's lips twitched as he saw a Fae swoop over the wall of iron spikes only to meet the glowing silver blade of the Knight of the Cross. The Russian one danced amongst his enemies with a deadly grace, swinging and cutting into vulnerable flesh, while the American one stood back, defending Moody, Kingsley and the other offensive spell-casters from crafty and agile Fae who managed to get over the wall. They were doing well.

He was also aware that it would not take Maeve long to dismantle the fortifications- and then the people inside- so he refocused his attention back on her with a disarming smile and continued to bide time for young Ms. Carpenter to rescue Harry and bring him back.

"You annoy me, old man," Maeve spat out. "I think that once I am done with you, I will visit that precious school of yours and take out my anger at your transgressions on your young."

"I think you will find that Hogwarts is far more protected than even I fully understand," Albus spoke calmly. "Indeed, I invite you to breach the castle. It would save me the hassle of dealing with you and I can focus my energies on more important matters. For instance, do you know I haven't visited my Great Uncle Norbert for over twenty years? Alas, I keep intending to see how he is doing but, well, he is rather barmy and I am a busy man."

"Less talk, more die!" Maeve snarled. Ice shimmered around her, Winter's power flowing through the ground and Albus' eyes widened as his feet began to sink. He quested out with his mind while instinctively gesturing with his wand.

A brilliant lance of crimson energy, so powerful that it cracked ice with its mere presence, roared towards Maeve. At the same time, Fawkes appeared in a brilliant explosion of golden fire and swooped down. Maeve dispelled Dumbledore's curse with a wave of her hand as Fawkes landed on Dumbledore's shoulder and pulled him out of the icy quicksand with ease. He landed on the ground and gave Fawkes a grateful look, to which the bird replied and then disappeared again, the very presence of the Winter fortress unsettling and painful for the phoenix.

“My, my,” Dumbledore exclaimed in delight as he brushed himself off. “How unexpected! I am quite impressed, Lady Maeve. I wasn’t aware that your talents extended to that outside of brute force and savagery.”

Maeve smiled thinly.

“Yes, antagonise the person who is about to rend you limb from limb,” she murmured. “That’s a very intelligent decision.”

“My students have always said that I was a little odd,” Dumbledore admitted. “And those were the pleasant ones...”

He was cut off by the loud sound of thunder, which boomed and rattled the roof and walls around them. Dumbledore’s smile faded as Maeve took a step forward, suddenly looking victorious as water began to drip from the roof. First one drop, and then another. Soon, it was as if the two of them were standing under a very gentle rain. Dumbledore’s face was grim and his stance tense as Maeve held out her hands, as if embracing the strange storm. Her pale skin was glowing with an unearthly beauty as the Fae bathed in Winter’s Rain, strengthening and empowering herself.

“Albus Dumbledore,” Maeve said quietly. “You were foolish to have come here, for this will be your death.”

The Winter Lady closed her eyes and made no other move. Yet, Albus had to leap out of the way with a flick of his wand and more agility than one would expect in an old man as lightning roared from the rooftop. The ground splintered and exploded and the air reeked with ozone as the old man spun around, his wand flying through the motions automatically as he deflected or repelled a series of lightning storms that filled his vision with light. Maeve laughed wildly lightning roared from the roof, showering Dumbledore in sparks. The old man disappeared beneath the thunderstorm and out of sight.

Then, abruptly, the lightning bolts and crackling energy exploded in a concussive wave of sheer force. Maeve staggered, eyes wide with shock, as Dumbledore reappeared, his wand extended out. The Headmaster looked grim as he flicked his wand up, little shards of

debris and shrapnel around him morphing into an array of beasts that would look at home in a circus. He brandished his wand- his makeshift army charged. Maeve countered, tearing them apart one by one with blasts of magic that completely vapourised them and left static charges zapping and hissing in the air. The two battled again, producing awe-inspiring feats of magic that made the ground rumble and the air screech in protest. A spell that had the potential to knock over the Astronomy Tower at Hogwarts left naught but a small gash on Maeve's cheek, while a chilling blizzard- the very same that Harry once used to kill a mighty Drakon- only managed to make Dumbledore's beard a little frosty.

Finally, Dumbledore decided to take the initiative out of the brutal stalemate the two opponents had found themselves in and murmured a word that not even Maeve recognised. Blackness enveloped where his wand went, a crack in the real world, and Dumbledore took a step forward and disappeared within it.

Maeve paused, looking uncertain. Her cat-like green eyes surveyed the area, noting the wand-wizards who continued to hold off her forces with admirable determination and skill. Dumbledore hadn't left, no, not without his people. Not without Harry. Suddenly, the Winter Lady heard a splintering, cracking sound from beside her and spun around, Fae power pooling in her hands.

The large, black crack ripped through the air and Dumbledore calmly stepped out of it, as if he merely taken a stroll to the kitchens rather than stepped through space and time itself. His wand was out and a brilliant golden light shot out towards Maeve. Her power lashed out, mixing and fighting with Dumbledore's, but the old man had prepared his spell much more thoroughly than Maeve and Winter was driven back by Summer. Maeve's eyes widened and Dumbledore looked upon grimly as Summer Fire began to envelope Maeve. While the spell would not kill her, he hoped that it would injure her enough so that Dumbledore would be able to evacuate the Order and Harry and leave.

Something quick darted forward and Dumbledore cancelled his spell, deflecting a wave of sharpened icicles and stopping them from impaling his body thrice over. The blur reappeared by Maeve's side

and Amaris quickly stood in front of her mother, as if willing to take the next curse for her. Dumbledore hesitated as Maeve straightened and glared at him with glowing eyes. She spat out a couple of words as Dumbledore backed up defensively and a cocoon of ice rose up to surround her. Dumbledore stared at the cocoon and conjured a giant, iron frame to surround it. For a Fae of Maeve's level, it would not trap her for long and he began to prepare a powerful spell.

He paused and winced as a droplet of water fell down from the roof, somehow slicing through his robe. Dumbledore glanced up and his eyes widened in visible surprise behind his half-moon glasses. The roof of the fortress was dripping with little goblets of water, which would drop down with the force of a bullet. As he watched, water seeped in from outside and a sudden shower of rain began to bombard him. Dumbledore shielded himself by conjuring a makeshift roof of dull iron as the sharpened drops of water slammed into the ground with great force, tearing up ice and stone alike.

Under such a barrage, his cover soon buckled and snapped under the strain. At the same time, the dome of snow and ice that covered Amaris and Maeve exploded outwards in a shower of sharp, deadly debris. Maeve appeared, flanked by her daughter, her eyes glowing as she gestured with her hand. Dumbledore, his face grim, met her head on as his wand swished and spun around him. Massive blasts of power were exchanged as deadly rain fell from the roof. Lightning crackled and zapped out of existence, golden fire arched through the air and fell upon the Fae and ice crept up from the ground in an attempt to impale him. Dumbledore countered it all with an ease that was unnatural, his wand almost glimmering with a deep black light as he met the power of one of the Winter Queens and withstood it resolutely.

Then, Dumbledore halted and grunted as pain coursed through his body. It was as if little icy shards were flowing through his bloodstream, carving and slashing at everything they came across. He coughed, a trickle of blood dribbling down his beard, and slowly turned his head. Amaris stared back at him blankly, a little lump of ice in her hand. Within the ice, Dumbledore saw a drop of red and realised with a start that it was his own blood.

“Well do...” he began, only to choke off as Amaris plunged her fingers into the cube of ice.

It glowed with a dim, malevolent scarlet light and Dumbledore heaved a round of hacking, rough coughs. He barely avoided Maeve’s powerful spell as he slapped it aside in a display of arcane spell work. He lifted his wand and, with great effort, drew a hole in space and time and stepped into it. Almost immediately after he disappeared so did the glowing light within Amaris’ crystal.

Amaris watched on blankly and barely heard the splintered hiss and tear that signified Dumbledore’s imminent arrival. She turned around, her head cocked with curiosity, and flinched when Dumbledore casually batted her aside carelessly with nothing more than a flick of his wand. He studied the bloodstained crystal and levelled his wand at it. A flash of golden light erupted from the tip and the drop of suspended blood was torn asunder by Winters opposite. Still, it appeared that the damage was done as Dumbledore heaved great breaths, feeling an awful tightness to his chest despite his attempts at healing himself.

“She’s a very useful little girl, isn’t she?” Maeve spoke, casually flinging bolts of power towards Dumbledore- who deflected them all, but began breathing a little harder. “So many skills and talents all in one little perfect body. I’ll admit, some of the things that she’s capable didn’t come from me. Who knew that Harry was such good...breeding stock.”

Dumbledore chuckled in good humour. “I don’t think that Harry would mind too much if he were to be given the role of the stud,” he said. He circled Maeve, watching her carefully and wishing that Fawkes was able to arrive to assist him.

“Oh, he would mind,” Maeve murmured and grinned sneakily. “You’d understand if you ever see how I treat my animals.”

“Ah, Maeve, I do not believe that our relationship extends that far,” Dumbledore replied. “And, if I may be so bold to admit, I do not believe it ever will.”

“What, you don’t want to get to know me?” Maeve mocked.

Dumbledore smiled gently. “You misunderstand me, my dear. It’s just that, well, it is quite difficult to have a relationship with the person you are about to kill.”

Maeve stilled and any semblance of human emotion left her face.

“I’ll admit that I did not come here seeking your death,” Dumbledore continued obliviously. “But, after seeing your power, I know what must be done. You are powerful, Lady Maeve. I see that now. But you are too powerful.” He gave her a penetrating gaze. “No Lady of either court should amass the power that you have. Your powers are an abomination, my Lady, and they must be contained. The balance between Summer and Winter must remain as it is.”

“You’re going to kill me?” Maeve asked and smiled cruelly. “Fool. I have worked too long and too hard to allow some old, withered human husk to defeat me. Yes, your knowledge is formidable and your magic is strong. But- it is not enough.”

“You will find that I have only begun in my efforts to tear you asunder,” Dumbledore replied quietly. He raised his wand, his normally gentle eyes hard. “Allow me to demonstrate.”

“I don’t think so,” Maeve snapped and the ground shuddered. Dumbledore’s head snapped around and he gazed at the little bastion of Order members. The roof above them was beginning to drip with water in much the same way it had before. “You see, I’m sure you’re very powerful and, frankly, I don’t want to have to deal with you in the future. No, I think you won’t see this one through, little Albus.”

Dumbledore narrowed his eyes as Maeve smiled down at him seductively. Power coiled around her lithe frame and her cat-like pupils dilated. Her eyes flickered away from Dumbledore and the Headmaster felt a flash of shock as he realised Maeve’s intended target. He paused, logic warring with emotion, and he hesitated.

No. The Order could not be allowed to perish here.

Without another word, he drew another one of his cracks- ignoring the tightness of his throat and the aches of his body that came with using the Word- and stepped into it. Maeve watched him go and gave him a casual wave, a triumphant smirk on her face.

Nearby, Amaris struggled to her feet emotionlessly- although her brows were furrowed minutely. She stood there and watched as Dumbledore reappeared amidst the Order of Phoenix, his wand swishing and flicking. A moment later, Maeve directed her sharpened blades of rain towards her targets and brought her arm down dramatically. The raindrops howled as they fell from the roof, descending on the only-now aware Order members. A couple of the early drops made it to the ground, one tearing through the iron battlements around them, ripping through the steel with ease. The other slammed into one of the wand-wizards arms, which was ripped through and torn off as if the raindrop had the power of a swung battleaxe.

The wizard screamed and collapsed as Dumbledore drew himself up. His normally gentle voice boomed out an incantation and a sudden light flared in the air as his power spread across the Order, shielding his Order under an umbrella of defensive magic. Rain splattered on the shield, each drop sounding like a blast of lightning, and several of the wand-wizards clasped their hands over their ears as a continually barrage of sound assaulted them. Amaris watched with little emotion on her pale face as Dumbledore met the eyes of her mother across the hall, his gaze furious and his white-hot anger very palpable.

Maeve only smiled and lifted her arm. Something unseen slithered through the air and Amaris almost shuddered as an enormous well of dirty, black power caressed her bare skin. It felt greasy and slimy, the sum total of everything bad that the world had ever created all represented by a single curse. At that moment, Amaris could understand what Dumbledore had been speaking of when he declared Maeve's power an abomination. Nonetheless, she did nothing as Lady Maeve brought together her dark power and prepared to sling it at Dumbledore, who was still distracted as he desperately tried to protect his Order.

Then, from out of nowhere, a giant fiery beast loomed up in the air and Amaris shifted on her feet. Dark, fiery eyes glinted with malevolence as the enormous bone-like dragon let out a resounding roar. Amaris heard desperation, sorrow, pain and a complete and utter hatred and couldn't help but shudder. The cursed flame, reeking just as much as Maeve's own powers, took a rumbling step forward. Maeve, her eyes widened, immediately shifted her aim and let loose. Something just as enormous as the fiery beast before her rushed through the air, invisible except for the ripples in the air that it caused. It collided with the cursed flame and a loud, ear-splitting screech filled the air. The fiery beast and the dark curse collapsed together in a series of roaring bangs and then all fell silent as somebody strolled out to meet Maeve. Amaris couldn't help it and her mouth automatically.

"Father," she whispered silently.

Her father, his emerald eyes completely wreathed with Hellfire, stepped forward to meet her mother, nothing short of utter hatred and fury contorting his face. Amaris composed herself and began to approach him when somebody else rushed out of the tunnel. The young blonde, Amanda, and the glowing sword immediately captured Amaris' attention. The little Fae teenager narrowed her eyes uncharacteristically, feeling something bitter at the bottom of her stomach, and changed course to intercept. The newest Knight of the Cross noticed her approach and paused, her grip tightening on the blade as Amaris came to stand in front of her.

"You cannot interfere," Amaris said blandly.

"Amaris," Amanda said warningly. "Get out of my way."

Amaris cocked her head. "No," she answered calmly.

"I know what you and your mother have done to Harry," Amanda declared, her nostrils flaring. "If you don't get out of my way, I'm going to have to make you and, trust me, I won't feel the least bit sorry."

"Then come," Amaris motioned with her hand.

Amanda hesitated, then, gripped her sword and swung silver fire at the Fae. Amaris nimbly dodged and the two females began to battle as Winter Power and Soulfire roared through the air.

“Harry, Harry, Harry,” Maeve chided, wagging her finger at him. “Who went and let you out of your cage?”

“Maeve,” Harry spoke hoarsely and with a decidedly feminine tinge. Fire wreathed his irises and the thick, noxious fumes of sulphur seemed to flow off his skin. “You should not have harmed my host.”

“Meciel,” Maeve greeted with a bow of her head. “I have nothing against you, Fallen one. Your host, however, became problematic and I had to deal with him. Surely you can see that- or are you too blinded by emotion.”

Harry smiled thinly. “An attack on my host is an attack on me. Besides, you are, as my host would say, a backstabbing slut, and it will be my pleasure to rend you limb from limb.”

Maeve chuckled loosely, her gaze briefly fluttering over to the Order where Dumbledore was just about finished countering her latest spell. She sighed and lifted her arm above her head. Harry tensed when she brought it down and stood still as a sudden horde of Fae of all different sizes and shapes slowly seeped out of the icy walls. The new host of beasts immediately turned to the Order and began to assault them, tall, slim and inhumanly beautiful surrounding Dumbledore, each wielding the full power of their blood. Maeve turned back to Harry with a little smile playing on her lips.

“We can’t have little Albus distracting us, can we?” she murmured. “Not now of all times.”

Harry sneered, his wand trembling in his grip. Never had he felt such utter hatred towards anything before now. His loathing of the Blackened Order, his anger at Lord Voldemort, his irritation at the Knights of the Cross- they were nothing when compared to the bitch that stood before him with her seductive smile. He hated the way that his eyes were drawn to her pale flesh even as he stood here ready to kill her. Meciel reverberated with fury as well, her vast emotions

spilling over into his own until he became one mass of tight, knotted anger.

It was an anger that Harry had rarely experienced before. He had risen above the fiery rage and display of tempers that characterised other anger. This anger was cold, deadly. Every iota of his being sought to end Maeve's existence and his magic agreed, Hellfire roaring at the prospect of looming bloodshed as it surged through his veins.

"Maeve," Harry began quietly. "I have only one thing to say to you: Crucio!"

Dark magic zapped through the air as Maeve sidestepped with ease. Harry saw the enjoyment on her face and growled. The desire to feel her bones break underneath his hands too much for him and he charged for her, his wand flinging up and producing wave after wave of roaring flames, which assaulted Maeve from all sides. He tensed and slowed in his step for a few moments as Meciél concentrated. As Maeve brushed aside his flames like they were an irritating fly, Harry opened his mouth and boomed out a Word with great fury.

The sound roared through the great hall of ice and the walls cracked under the pressure. Maeve's eyes widened as a wave of pure concussive force shot at her. She waved her arm, ice growing out from the ground and looming up to surround her, but the Word shattered her defensive spell and slammed into her. Almost instantly, the Winter Lady's innate magical resistance negated most of the blow but, for the first time in the battle, Maeve was sent reeling back.

"Avada Kedavra!" Harry bellowed furiously. Green light roared forward with all the power of Hellfire behind it. "Effodio!"

Maeve, the expression of enjoyment conflicting with her battered and bruised face received from the Word, nimbly dodged under the killing curse, inhaling deeply as if she enjoyed the rotten, decayed scent of death that it brought with it. She stood back up again and casually backhanded the silver blast away as Harry cursed inwardly. He needed a good old stick of iron and, sadly, his transfiguration and

conjunction skills weren't that good- not when his wand was literally buzzing with Hellfire.

Maeve reached out and made gesture with her hand. The ice underneath Harry's feet cracked and splintered and the Denarian Lord attempted to jump back, Hellfire enhancing his physical capabilities to Olympic standards- perhaps better. Nonetheless, a geyser of water exploded where he had been standing and Maeve made another gesture, thick loops of boiling water rushing out to encircle his leg. His skin sizzled and began to redden as Harry quickly sliced through the bindings with his wing.

He landed lightly on the ground and was already beginning a counter-spell, his wand at his lips. Hellfire raged and condensed into a tight stream of chaotic force as Harry took in a deep breath and exhaled. Fiendfyre roared in fury, casting a brilliant light on the rapidly dimming hall as glowing crystals were smashed and torn apart. Harry swished and flicked his wand as the Fiendfyre took the shape of the gigantic boneworm, the cursed flame screeching and roaring with insatiable hunger. The ground rumbled and the temperature rose by the dozens as the beast of flame lumbered toward Maeve, who took a deep breath of her own and opened her mouth.

What came next was something akin to a Word of the Worlds.

It was almost lyrical and somewhat haunting and beautiful. Maeve's words ripped through the air, carrying great power within them, and struck the Fiendfyre beast even as Harry flinched, his ears suddenly ringing with her words, which bounced across his mind again and again and again. The cursed flame shuddered and wavered as the words ripped into it, disrupting Harry's fine control and sending the fire rampant across the ground. Abruptly, the fire lost form and shape and collapsed to the ground in a shower of glowing molten-rock-like flame. Harry growled and staggered on his feet, unable to properly shield himself as Maeve sent him careening across the ground with a simple wave of her hand.

He lay there, groaning and his mind whirring, when an idea abruptly came to mind. He wasn't the only person to have ever tried to kill Maeve. There'd be another group, and they had used something that

had almost had her on the ropes before he had showed up. With a sudden grin, Harry climbed back to his feet, instinctively letting loose a few spells, and began the task in the short lapses of combat with Maeve.

Amanda gritted her teeth and parried Amaris away as she attempted to regain her footing. The glowing sword in her hand glowed with a hot, silver flame yet the hilt felt cool and almost reassuring. Even so, Amanda could feel the strain of the blade on her muscles and body and she was well aware that she was panting fiercely, sweat beading down her forehead. The ground shuddered again but Amanda didn't turn her head to see what immense spell Maeve or Harry had conjured this time. Amanda's stomach stung and she didn't need to look down to know that blood was trickling from the slash that Amaris had delivered right when she had been distracted.

If she had remained still an instant later, she would be dead.

Amanda glared at the girl on the other side of the blade. To her credit, Amaris hardly looked fazed, her simple white dress plastered against her superior body. Amanda didn't feel jealous at the sight of her enemy's superior body. She was still trying to get over the fact that Amaris, the little eight year old girl she had known last year was around her age now.

She was also well aware that the girl before her was merely toying with her. It was not a good feeling.

"You are untrained for sword combat," Amaris remarked quietly, as if she were disinterested by the entire affair. "Whatever training Father gave to you last year obviously did not extend that far, although, your physical conditioning and reflexes are far superior to your classmates."

Her father- Harry.

"You have no right to even mention Harry in front of me," Amanda snarled, feeling hatred welling up within her. She briefly wondered how her dad could stay so emotionless in a fight and tightened her grip on the sword. "Not after what you did to him."

"I tried to help him," Amaris explained blankly. Her shadowed and oh-so familiar eyes briefly flickered with some kind of emotion. "He did not want my help. Hence, he suffered."

"You were the one who kidnapped him in the first place," Amanda snapped and lunged.

Her blade swung out in a clumsy, powerful blow. Amaris clenched her first and black ice shimmered down her hand, forming into a small, wrist blade which Harry's daughter promptly used to parry the Sword away. Amanda missed, the silver flame gouging a rough line through the ice-coated wall, while Amaris' wrist blade shattered under the power of the Soulfire- only to be reformed an instant later as Amaris stepped forward and began to methodically slice away at Amanda.

Amanda was driven back as Amaris calmly and quietly chipped away at her defences, reforming her blade every time it shattered. It was almost clinical in the way that she did it and there was no emotion on her face as she finally batted Amanda's sword out of her hand, spun around and delivered a vicious kick to Amanda's chest. Amanda's eyes widened with surprise and the air left her lungs as she skidded along the ice. Amaris was already moving by the time Amanda had stopped, but the Fae girl paused in her track as Amanda flicked her wrist and summoned her wand from the sleeves of her robe.

"Effodio!"

A crack filled the air and the ground beneath Amaris exploded just an instant after the Fae girl had backpedalled. Amanda staggered up, her wand flicking and flying as she used every iota of knowledge and skill Harry had ever given her and began her attempt to maim his daughter. Amanda was quick with her wand, three spells flying out every second or so as she advanced on the small girl in an attempt to reach the Sword of the Cross. To the blonde-haired girl's dismay, Amaris met the onslaught and countered every spell perfectly. Every curse was dodged, every hex perfectly countered with some kind of Fae magic that negated it with a shower of sparks and every jinx flicked away with just a finger.

It was obvious that the slim dark-haired girl was skilled, much more skilled than Amanda. Amanda felt a pool of dread in the pit of her stomach, knowing that it had only been luck that had kept her alive during their sword fight. She was not totally clueless as to the abilities of the Swords of the Cross, yet she knew that even they had their limits.

"Why...why did you do this, Amaris?" Amanda panted out as she stopped her assault. Her emotions were raging through her, anger, confusion and helplessness. "I thought you liked Harry! Why did you take him here?"

Amaris cocked her head.

"Like?" she repeated. "I love my father, Knight, more than what my species should be capable of. I wish nothing but the best for him."

"Then why?" Amanda shouted angrily. "Goddamit, Amaris! I liked you and then you go and do something like this!"

Amaris was quiet. "Consider this," she finally said. "Your mother and father are separated. They dislike each other yet you love them both. Then, your mother tells you to attack your father. You love your father, yet you also love your mother. What would you do?"

"I...I would stop my mother!" Amanda snarled. "I would do the right thing..."

Amaris smiled thinly. "Fool," she said and Amanda staggered at sheer contempt in her tone. "One does not say 'no' to my mother. The Lady Queen of Winter is not refused- ever."

"You still shouldn't have done it," Amanda declared fiercely. She eyed the Sword of the Cross, which lay close to Amaris- who was studiously avoiding the holy blade. "It was wrong!"

"No it wasn't," Amaris replied quietly and cocked her head quizzically when Amanda gaped at her.

"What do you mean? How is it not wrong?" Amanda asked furiously.

"I...do not understand," Amaris admitted quietly. "The real question is: how is it not right? I obeyed my Mother."

"Yeah, by hurting your father!"

"Yes," Amaris confirmed with a nod. The dark-haired girl was silent as Amanda gaped at her, struggling to find words. Then, sudden realisation hit the Hogwarts student and she sighed bitterly.

"You really don't understand, do you?" Amanda asked with dawning realisation. "You really don't understand that you did something wrong. You're just incapable of seeing it."

"It wasn't wrong," Amaris countered calmly. She made no attempt to attack Amanda as the blonde began to inch toward the Sword of the Cross. "You are trying to apply your set of human ethics and ideals of morality to my actions when you simply cannot. I am Fae. I am Winter. You have no understanding of my culture. You have no understanding of our ways, of our loyalties. You are just as incapable of understanding me just as I am incapable of understanding your logic."

"You...I..." Amanda trailed off as Amaris stiffened.

Something was happening. As one, both Amanda and Amaris turned and watched as Harry and Maeve kept battling. Harry was throwing off a weird net of greenish-blue light while Maeve was backing away as a suit of armour rushed at her. With a startling realisation, Amanda recognised it as exactly like the ones at Hogwarts. This one, however, had a set of glowing runes carved into it and held a large iron sword. Maeve raised her hand and Amanda flinched as her hair stood up at end, fierce powers surging towards the suit of armour and being brushed aside. Fae magic was obsolete on steel, Amanda recalled, and the runes on the armour seemed to be protecting it somehow as well.

"Mother..." Amaris murmured and, without even so much as a glance at Amanda, took off towards Maeve in quick stride.

Maeve's face had twisted into a fierce scowl as she spun around, delivering blast after blast of power at the animated suit of armour, which caused little more than making it unsteady of its feet for a short time. Amanda saw Harry behind it, a vicious smirk on his face as he directed the suit with his wand. With a sudden rush of determination, Amanda picked up the Sword of the Cross and sprinted on after her opponent.

She ducked and dodged as sneering, beastly Fae suddenly saw her as a viable target, her sword swinging up and slashing them away with silver fire and pure determination. Amaris ignored her as she swiftly approached her mother, lifting her hand and flicking little crackling jolts of emerald power at the construct. The wards protecting the suit of armour brushed them off as it clanked and groaned, approaching Maeve and raising its swords. Fire was spilling from its eyes, stinking sulphur polluting the air and staining everything it came into contact with.

Amanda watched with surging emotions as Amaris paused, her face scrunching up in concentration even as her mother shrieked out something. The ground rumbled, the air screeched in protest and Amanda screamed as she was hurled backwards just from being on the outskirts of such a devastating spell. The suit of armour cracked but remained solid as the power brushed off its warded, iron surface. Amanda landed on the ground painfully and cried out when something within her body let out a terrible 'crack'. She squirmed and panted, writhing on the ground and arching her back as waves of agony rolled down her back.

Distantly, she saw the suit of armour lumber towards Maeve, who indeed looked panicked now- especially since two more were now approaching her. Amaris continued to futilely attack the suit of armour, drawing its attention for a split second. Perhaps Amanda was imagining it as a haze of pain settled upon her mind, but she could have sworn that she saw Maeve glance at her daughter with sudden, chilling realisation. Then, the haze settled over her eyes and she closed them as her weariness began to overtake them.

She almost didn't hear the deafening scream of pain that suddenly filled the air. Some part of her mind nudged at her, insisting that she knew that voice, but it fell silent as Amanda fell unconscious.

Harry watched on with a terrible smile and a vicious sense of satisfaction as the suit of armour lumbered on towards Maeve, her last, powerful spell proving to be inefficient against the enchanted iron construct. He may not have been able to conjure iron, but he could certainly use the scraps and heaps of metal that the Order was flinging out with reckless abandon for his own purposes. He watched his little creation approach Maeve anxiously.

When he had rescued Maeve and Amaris last year, the enemy that Maeve had been fighting had used something similar to shatter past her guards and fortifications. Dumbledore had also used something similar and Harry had watched him create it. Even if he hadn't been paying attention, Meciél had, and he was a natural genius with his work so it hadn't taken him too long to work out how to create something similar to what he had seen. It was the perfect opponent for a Fae.

The suit of armour lumbered on and Harry twitched his wand, manipulating the gleaming, sharpened sword of steel to rise up in a killing blow. He poured every iota of his hatred into the construct, fuelling it with Hellfire, and bared his teeth in satisfaction, his body thrumming with eagerness. Then, abruptly, Maeve straightened and met his eyes and Harry felt his stomach lurch.

She wasn't panicked. She wasn't fearful. The cool consideration behind them sent a flash of unease through Harry even as he directed the construct to lunge forward. A pale arm shot out, something was pushed before it, a head of black silk rose up and stunned emerald eyes met those of their father for a single split-second.

The sword dove forward, blood splattered to the ground and Harry, despite every instinct telling him not to, paused in shock.

Amaris, standing before Maeve with a gleaming sword of steel protruding from her back, opened her mouth in silent agony. Her

normally expressionless eyes were wide with shock and...something that could only be utter betrayal. Her arms fell to her side limply, her white dress staining crimson around her wound. She opened her mouth to speak, but all that came out was a breath of crimson mist. Harry stood there, his wand loose in his hand and his eyes wide with shock as the fury that had fuelling him fled his battered body.

What the hell had just happened?

The slender hand that was on Amaris' shoulder, the one that had pushed her into the path of the sword, tightened its grip as Maeve leant forward, nothing less than sheer malice burning in her eyes. Pale lips curved upwards, fingers brushing against her daughter's trembling cheeks.

"My, my, Harry," she breathed softly, her words somehow apparent over the distance. "It looks like that you've just murdered your daughter."

Something flashed in front of him. The shattered remains of the icy barrier that Maeve had constructed whipped up and a howling wind roared through the hall. Harry caught a glimpse of Maeve's twisted smiles. Her hand lifted off Amaris' shoulder, pointed at him, and suddenly he was in a blizzard. Winds raged and icy shards ripped through his exposed body. Something slammed into his head, sending dizzy waves through his entire body, and his vision flashed with bright light. He was distantly aware of being blasted off his feet with great force, of being propelled backwards in a twister of snow and ice, but something small and warm slammed into him and sent him skidding out of the blizzard and onto the hard ground.

He groaned, his head throbbing and his body feeling light. He sat up, brushing aside the shards of ice on his shoulder and attempting to ignore the big jagged edges stuck in his chest. Something thudded onto the ground next to him and collapsed in his lap and Harry looked down. Amaris, blood trickling from her mouth, stared up at him with dying green eyes. Her breath rattled in her chest, and something twisted in Harry's gut as he stared down at her.

What was he feeling?

Amaris had tortured him.

Amaris had betrayed him.

Amaris had used the same tricks as her mother on him.

He was, without a doubt, supremely pissed off at her. Yet, he hadn't wanted to kill her- or had he? No, not if he could have helped it! Meciél stretched in his mind grimly, her own thoughts conflicted as well. She, more than anybody, had taken a shine to Amaris. To see her before him, so battered up, because of him...

"Amaris," Harry breathed. His hands were clammy and shaking and a strange emotion was overtaking him, something he had so rarely felt before.

A shaking hand rose up and Harry stared at it blankly. He felt strangely numb, disconnected from what was happening. There was no great sense of sorrow or satisfaction, just a strange unsteadiness that made Harry sway, his eyes blinking rapidly. His hand continued to shake as he reached down and smoothed back Amaris's sweaty forehead, her hair soft under his fingertips. Amaris mewled and nuzzled at his hand like a wounded animal on the last legs of its life. Her skin was pale and clammy and Harry clinically examined her wound, his gut wrenching the more he looked at it.

For somebody like him, something like that would be nothing. A stab in the gut was a stab in the gut, something that could be mended within minutes. To Amaris, whose Fae blood ran thick in her veins- and all over him- a stab in the gut with iron was a death sentence, just like anybody else. Something must have been reflecting on his face because Amaris touched his hand softly, making him look down at her. For the first time in her life, Amaris gave him a shaky, genuine smile and opened her mouth.

Nothing came out and Amaris stiffened. She became limp in his lap and her eyes fluttered shut as a breath of air escaped from her lungs. A cloud of red mist struck Harry across the face and he hastily wiped

it away. When he looked down, Amaris was still and she did not open her eyes again.

Harry let his daughter rest on his chest for a few moments, feeling her slim body against his even as her blood began to seep on his tattered brown robes. He realized with a start that he was covered in it, her blood, something made from his blood. Then, as he cradled Amaris, he finally came to a decision about what he should be feeling.

Amaris had been his daughter.

His daughter.

This could not be forgiven.

“Maeve!” He breathed softly, yet furiously. His body was shaking as he carefully lay Amaris down and stood back up. His face, twisted into a permanent scowl of utter loathing, glared at her. “Maeve! You...you...”

He didn’t know he could be any angrier at the Winter Lady but he was. The suits of armour lay disbanded on the sides, smears of crimson coating the runes. Maeve’s fingers were drenched in blood, her daughter’s blood. Some part of his mind noted that she had probably used the blood connection between Amaris and Harry to disrupt the wards and dismantle the constructs.

The other part of him lifted his wand and leveled it at the Winter Lady.

“What a waste,” Maeve remarked bitterly, glancing at her fallen daughter. “To force me to use such measures- you are a very cruel man, Harry Potter.”

Harry gnashed his teeth.

“You...you...” He was struggling with words.

“You don’t mean to tell me that you still carried some affection for her, do you?” Maeve asked incredulously and laughed. “Harry, Harry,

Harry. This is why mortals are dumb. She caused you great pain and you still weep over her death!”

“I’m not fucking crying!” Harry shouted furiously. “And of course I was fucking pissed at her! I wanted to belt her across the fucking head for what she did, not murder her!”

“She did her duty,” Maeve noted. “You will never understand how...”

Harry snapped. His power sizzled the air around him as he roared in fury and unleashed a Word upon the Winter Lady. The air was split into two and a great chasm of inky blackness threatened to swallow Maeve whole. Abruptly, the blizzard reappeared and raged around Harry as he pushed through it. Sharp ice and bitter winds slashed at his skin, tearing at his already tattered robes, but Harry pressed on and opened his mouth again. Another Word left him, the world hung and froze and something massive and hot exploded around him. Blood dribbled down his mouth and his throat was ripped apart as he summoned yet a third Word in quick succession.

The space between the two opponents was a maelstrom of brilliant light and an exemplary display of the viciousness of nature. The elements raged against each other as their respective masters clashed in battle, fire melting ice to be met with water and wind to be met with more fire to be met with more water. This raged from the melted and cratered flood and extended all the way up to the ceiling of the hall. In the midst of this were two small figures in the backdrop of the raging storm. Magic flew between them, powerful spells ripping into each other again and again as Fallen and Fae circled each other. Harry’s wings of bone lashed out at Maeve, who blocked them with a wall of ice that sprung from the ground.

The wall continued to grow as Maeve stepped onto it, levelling her to ceiling height where she gathered her magic and drew the mist and steam of the surrounding ice toward her. Clouds formed around her and thunder boomed in the air. Lightning roared down in powerful concussive waves and energy crackled over Harry’s frame as he sprinted across the battlefield. He approached the wall, jumped over a pool of cooling molten rock and thrust his wand at the wall of ice. An incantation left his lips and the wall jerked. Maeve’s expression

became surprised as Harry grinned darkly at her, a twisted sneer on his lips.

Then, with a mighty boom, the wall crumbled and exploded into large chunks of ice and Maeve came careening down. Harry swished his wand even as he hurriedly stepped back, banishing large chunks of the glittery debris at the woman. But, something loomed up out of the mist and a gigantic arm of solid blackened ice swatted them away and slammed down towards Harry. Harry jumped back with a growl of anger, the palm slamming on the already uneven and cratered floor. He swished his wand- Fiendfyre leapt at his command and the appendage was bound in tight ropes of cursed flame.

‘Now!’

Harry took a deep breath and screamed in agony even as a Word left his mouth. The invisible ripples struck the Fiendfyre and suddenly both he and Maeve were surrounded in a massive firestorm. Winds howled all around them as the cursed flame sucked it all in while Harry groaned in silent agony, blood gushing from his mouth and as he coughed up meaty bits of gunk and gore. Nevertheless, the firestorm did not touch him as Maeve was forced back and back, cursed flames licking at her clothes. Harry could only grin at her tiredly as he straightened up, his body tired and aching. Around him, Fiendfyre burned with reckless abandon, far beyond his control yet not so that he was unable to shield himself from the deathly fire. He stood there, immune to dark magic he wielded, while Maeve struggled against the heat.

She made a motion with her hands and a snowstorm erupted from around her, howling winds and blankets of snow attempting to tame the raging power that Harry had unleashed. It was not enough to disrupt it, no, but with her snowstorm Maeve was able to keep most of the flames at bay while simultaneously dodging the barrage of green glowing curses that Harry had sent her way. In all rights, the Fiendfyre should have overwhelmed the soulless Fae before she had even known what was happening.

Yet, this was Maeve’s domain, her place of power. There was no fire here that she could not, with time, tame. Time was not something

Harry had as he felt his weakness straining his body. He had spent who-knows-how-long in that cell and it was not something that could be fixed so easily. After some time, his movements slowed and the fierce, overwhelming offensive paused. Maeve seemed to right herself and swept her arm at him with a fierce scowl at that exact moment. Harry was unable to block the magical blow that struck him with the force of a speeding car and sent him skidding across the floor.

He toppled over one of the craters and fell in, wincing as bones cracked and pain flared briefly in his mind. He landed in a large puddle of melted ice, the warm water splashing against his face, and Harry realised with a jolt just how thirsty he was. His hand stumbled for his wand but Maeve appeared at the centre, looking down at him with an utterly inhuman expression of fury. Her clothes were scorched, her eyes wild with power, and she lifted a hand even as the firestorm raged around her- kept back by an aura of sheer power that surrounded her. Her snowstorm continued to rage yet it was slowly dying down as the wild Fiendfyre began to overwhelm it.

Harry grinned up at her with bloodied teeth. No wonder she looked exhausted.

She clenched down on her fist and Harry gurgled in pain as the puddle became ice, snaking around him and binding him. She shouted something, a Fae incantation- the first one he had heard her use- and his teeth chattered as an unbelievable force pressed down upon him, keeping him immobile. He tried to bring his wings out but the ice held against his struggles as a sharpened tendril slithered up his chest, the blade gleaming menacingly.

He panicked, thrashing and kicking against the bonds as Hellfire roared in his body, but he was trapped. He glared up at Maeve furiously even as he tried to reach his wand- only a few short centimetres away from his fingertips. The rope of ice lifted itself up off his chest and the blade turned towards his head.

Harry's eyes widened.

“They say if you take the head off a snake a new one will grow to take its place,” Maeve said down at him and smiled chillingly. She looked exhausted and grimy, yet was radiating a sense of unbelievable satisfaction as she focussed her attention entirely upon him. “I do not think that that applies to Denarians as well. Enjoy your time in the Hell you are certain to go to.”

The tendril drew back, as if preparing to lunge forward with great force, and Harry gave one last desperate struggle against his unbreakable bonds. Then, the blade shimmered and struck forward. Harry winced and shut his eyes as pain erupted in his forehead. An instant later, something trickled down forehead and he opened his eyes. The blade had stopped on his skin but had not impaled his head. Harry could only gape as the ice began to shimmer, droplets of water dripping off it as it started to melt before his very eyes. He looked up, stunned.

Maeve stared down at him with shock. Protruding from her chest was a glowing silver steel sword. Holding the hilt of the blade was a bloodied yet determined-looking Amanda, who wrenched the sword in one last time. The firestorms raged around her as silver Soulfire poured into the Winter Lady’s body. Then, without so much as another word, Maeve collapsed and toppled into the large crater. She landed in one of the puddles of water, twitched and did not move again.

Amanda smiled down at Harry and then collapsed herself, her skin charred and blackened in places as the firestorm ate away at her. The sword could only provide her so much protection and the new Knight of the Cross had lost all of her remaining strength on that once-in-a-lifetime blow against the Winter Lady. As the storm of Fiendfyre raged around her, uncontrolled and untamed, Harry broke free of his weakening bonds and grabbed his wand. Amanda’s limp body soared towards him and Harry caught her, blonde hair splayed across his arms. He felt tired yet comfortable, the fire negating the coldness of the ice and threatening to send him to sleep.

“You...” somebody rasped.

Harry looked up to see Maeve glaring at him, her soulless eyes blinking at him rapidly. She was struggling against her wounds even now, attempting to gather her magic. Harry felt no qualms as he lifted his wand and levelled it at her.

“Avada Kedavra!”

A great jet of green light whooshed forwards and washed over Maeve’s beautiful features. When it faded away, her eyes were blank and her expression was twisted with shock and fear. Maeve, the Winter Lady and youngest of the Sidhe Queens, was dead.

A/N: For the record, the concept of the "Word of the Worlds" is my own original concept. It fits in with a magical theory that I was thought up of and I needed something cool for Dumbledore to teach Harry during The Denarian Lord- hence, the Words came into existence. A big thanks to DLP (what else is new) for their help on the chapter. I refined a lot of it so hopefully it reads a little smoother than before. I'm working on the next chapter as I upload this, so hopefully it won't be too long. Enjoy.

Oh, the 'decapitated' error in the last chapter was meant to be 'disipitated'. It's fixed now. Thanks for pointing it to me, guys.

Albus Dumbledore twirled his wand, fending off the vicious assaults of the slim, beautiful Fae. His eyes twinkled as a casual swish of his wand sent one of them spinning wildly through the air in an almost-comedic fashion. At the same time, he deflected a crackling sphere of energy with a loud 'pop' and sent it spiralling away. His movements had slowed and his weariness was showing, but his wand continued to blur in front of him with an almost instinctual ease, parrying and counterattacking with frightening ferocity.

One of the Fae leaped at him, a snarling face resembling that of werewolf, but Albus easily sidestepped and tapped his wand on the creature's flank as it soared past. It yelped, sounding frightened, and never struck the ground as it began to soar wildly through the air, zigzagging and spiralling in a set of aerobatic manoeuvres that would make a Quidditch player envious. Albus smiled rather gently even as his wand flashed up and delivered a scorching bolt of sizzling white energy that sliced through the muscular chest of a brutish centaur and split him in two.

Albus's smile disappeared and he frowned.

His wand was hot in his hand as he whirled round, his cloak billowing behind him- literally. The purple fabric wrapped around a sneering little goblin holding a bone-knife. The goblin squeaked and Albus ignored it, his cloak wrapping around the crumpled form tightly as the

aged Headmaster sent a vicious arc of silver magic that split the skull of a green, feminine mermaid-like Fae with ease. The cloak shuddered and unravelled and a lone knife clattered to the ground, its owner gone- never to be seen again.

“Oh dear,” Albus murmured and he paused. The Fae were content to leave him alone as they attempted to surround and swarm the Order of Phoenix, wary of the man’s unimaginable magical power.

For his part, Albus was keen enough to notice the slight throbbing in forefront of his mind, clear signs of an approaching migraine. His chest heaved as he took in deep breaths, automatically running through a set of calming exercises. His wand began to cool down in his hand and Albus opened his eyes, casually banishing a heap of debris at one Fae brave enough to assault him when he appeared to be helpless. The Headmaster glanced down at his wand and sighed quietly as he noticed tendrils of ominous black light seep back into his wand.

That had been a close. Albus had not taken the field of battle for quite some time and he was beginning to remember why. It was here, in the thick of things, when he was in the most danger- not from his enemies, who were almost certainly to lose, but from himself. Nevertheless, a crooked smile appeared behind the man’s large, white beard as he felt the buzz within his body die down. Fatigue brushed the edges of his mind but Albus accepted it, revelled in it, content to know that he was himself once more.

His next spell turned a slender, attractive girl, one who would look perfectly normal wearing Hogwarts robes, into a leather couch. The couch twitched and Albus chuckled as ropes exploded from the tip of his wand, binding several of her kin onto it. A swish, a flick and a tap sent his prisoners off into a deep, enchanted sleep while Albus calmly stepped forward. He brandished his wand and a glittery mist seeped from the tip of his wand, covering the flank of the fortifications of the Order.

A large, lumbering troll surged forward, pushing past its hesitant kin and letting out a giant roar of anger. It stepped into the glittering mist

and paused, taking a couple of deep breaths. It cocked its head, seemingly confused, before it gave an abrupt cough. Phlegm and a dark sticky substance flew from its mouth as the massive beast collapsed as the miniscule iron shards ripped through its body. Albus remained emotionless as he strolled towards his next target. The little mewling cat-like Fae moaned in terror and scuttled off when Albus paused, his head shooting towards the other side of the hall.

The atmosphere of the hall felt wrong and Albus shuddered as his skin tingled, otherworldly power drifting across the hall as Harry unleashed a powerful Word of the World. His eyes zoomed in on the battle, his eyebrows rising when Harry unleashed a second Word- and then a third, all in quick succession. Not for the first time, Albus couldn't help but feel amazed. Using a Word of the Worlds was a highly difficult process, without a doubt one of the hardest- if not the hardest- applications of wand magic in existence. As far as he knew, only a handful of wizards throughout history had ever managed to produce one without destroying themselves.

Harry had just produced three in quick succession and was still fighting despite the inevitable and terrible backlash that the Words must have caused. Albus's respect- and wariness- for the boy raised a few notches.

Albus quickly surveyed the situation amongst the Order, wincing almost imperceptibly at the still forms of his once loyal and dedicated friends. Then, taking a deep breath, he approached Lady Maeve and Harry Potter and prepared to assist his protégé in any way possible.

Suddenly, he paused and his wand zoomed up. He yelled out an incantation in haste and the force of the spell pushed him backwards, sending him soaring from the immense recoil. At the same time, the very air exploded with flames and a wicked howl went up through the air. Albus landed gracefully and stood back up, his eyes visibly widened. A gigantic storm of fire had filled up the space where Harry and Maeve had previously been. Searing heat brushed against his face and Albus instinctively tried to shield his eyes with his arm as he stared into it. The air was screeching in protest and great winds attempted to push the old man towards the fire as they were sucked into the swirling maelstrom of fire.

It didn't take a genius to discover that the foul, horrible flames were the result of the Fiendfyre Curse. Albus watched on grimly, unable to penetrate the dense mass of flames- he did not have the control that Harry, or even Lord Voldemort, commanded over dark magic such as this. Albus could not tell what was happening beyond the veil of searing heat and, not for the first time that evening, felt the common symptoms of frustration.

His keen senses alerted him to approaching trouble and, in his frustration, his arm snapped up. A shimmering pulse of light lashed out from his wand and struck a gigantic troll, who howled in agony as his limbs began to distort and his skin began to flap uselessly against the muscle. It collapsed but Albus ignored it as it began to thrash on the ground, its body warped and transfigured a mass of flapping skin and melted bone that made a mockery of normal flesh and bone.

"Do I dare?" Albus murmured to himself, regarding the Fiendfyre speculatively. While he could not stroll into the flames, the wizened man knew that he could permanently remove them if he chose to do so. But, if the Fiendfyre storm was essential to Harry's strategy then removing it might endanger the Denarian and possibly cost him the battle

At times like this, Albus wished that he could see into the future. A rather odd vision of being dressed in the misty, sparkling robes of Sybil and muttering about death and tragedy all the while giving off the strong scents of incense that his Divination Professor did disposed of that wish quite quickly.

"Oh dear," Albus chuckled quietly to himself. "I would look ridiculous." He paused and turned around, smiling amiably. "I'm sorry," he apologised to the trio of slender, pale-skinned Fae- who, until recently, had made themselves invisible as they had attempted to sneak up on him. "It's an inside joke, I'm afraid."

"Child of Summer," spoke the lead, a very tall male Sidhe. His electric-blue cat-like eyes surveyed him keenly while his elaborate blue and silver clothes, signs of nobility in the Winter Court, flapped in

the winds created by the firestorm behind them. "You trespass on Winter land and bring violence against our court."

"Rather, it is you who have trespassed on my domain," Albus countered politely. He smoothed his beard, looking entirely unconcerned with the level of opposition he was facing even as the Sidhe's two companions circled him, a pair of identical females who looked as if they still hadn't reached puberty. "Your Lady has overstepped her bounds and, as such, I was forced to take immediate action."

"My Lady's will is my life," the Sidhe countered blandly. "She has decreed that you are the enemy." Something malicious flashed through his eyes. "To wield the fire of Summer here in the Court of Winter merely proves her right."

"I- oh, excuse me," Albus apologised. He raised his arm, gave a quick swish and murmured something before the Sidhe before him had even blinked.

The two little girls trying to flank him let out identical cries of surprise and thick ropes exploded from the torn and shattered floor of ice, wrapping around them and binding them together tightly. Albus gave the Sidhe, who had tensed and looked distinctly uncomfortable, a polite smile and, as quickly as it had come, his wand disappeared from his hand.

"Now, where was I?" Albus mused thoughtfully. "Ah, yes. You were just telling me that I was your enemy. I assume that you will take some form of action against me. For your sake- and the sake of your subordinates- I strongly suggest that you do not try." A cold expression flickered briefly on his face. "At this time, I find myself lacking the patience to deal with weaker opponents nicely and, I must say, you are significantly weaker and less skilled than I am."

The Sidhe sneered and Albus felt his lips twitch. With the male's pale hair and aristocratic looks, he could have passed for one of the many vain and pompous Pureblood students that he had been forced to deal with for decades. Power began to coil in the Sidhe's hand and

Albus readied himself, his wand tingling beneath his long, baggy sleeves.

Then, something shifted in the air and the High Sidhe before him let out a terrible cry. Albus watched in surprise as the Sidhe clutched his head and shook it frantically, as if clearing a terrible fog off his mind. The two bound girls did the same and Albus allowed their bind to fall as they collapsed to the ground. Nearby, similar reactions were occurring throughout many of the Fae- although just as many continued to fight, albeit more frantically and panicked than ever.

The Sidhe staggered and glanced up at Albus, almost as if he didn't recognise him. Albus narrowed his eyes as his opponent broke off without conjuring a single spell and, with a quick signal to his two subordinates, swiped his hand through the air. A crack appeared through the air, a very rough portal forming to an unknown part of the Nevernever, and the three Fae disappeared. The crack closed up behind them, leaving a strangely confused Headmaster behind.

"Now, now. Isn't this interesting?" Albus murmured as he surveyed the area.

More and more Fae were disappearing in portals of their own or turning tail and fleeing. The ones that remained behind were stricken with something that could only be fear and panic, lashing out more at each other than at the Order of Phoenix- who, encouraged by the sudden disruption in the enemies resolve, pressed forward and broke the siege that had trapped them in their fortifications in a matter of seconds.

Albus turned back to the firestorm of unstable cursed flame and frowned. Such a severe reaction could only mean one thing, or, at least, that was what his somewhat limited knowledge of the Winter Court was telling him. He hesitated for a split moment, internally pondering if he could be wrong, but took a deep breath and raised his wand. His mind stilled for a split second and, using advanced Occulmency and other mental techniques, Albus wrapped himself around the consciousness of an alien being and empathised with it long enough to conjure up a Word of the Worlds.

A loud crack filled the air, easily heard over the raging storm of the fire, and a solid, black ball- no bigger than the size of a marble- shot from the tip of his wand. It arced over the fire and approached the roof, while Dumbledore paused and took a deep breath, feeling his old and withered hand shake slightly as pain boomed in his mind. Albus pressed forward, nothing showing on his face, and concentrated his will upon the Word, which hovered over the Fiendfyre and paused. An incredible hiss filled the air and the massive firestorm drifted up toward the orb, which began to suck up the flames with incredible force.

For his part, Albus ignored the waves of pain that spread all the way through his old and tired frame as he stood resolute. It was his unyielding will that stopped the Word from absorbing anything else apart from flame into itself, and the strain was almost too much on his body. Despite that, the Fiendfyre was quickly disappearing, spirally up into the air in an awesome display of nature. A final, loud and inhuman roar came from the rapidly vanishing Fiendfyre, almost as if the cursed flame was screaming out in protest, before it disappeared into the orb with a soft 'pop'.

Albus relaxed with a weary sigh and the orb, now the colour of molten steel, shuddered once and fell to the ground. It landed in a pile of melted ice and went still, glowing radiantly in the relative darkness that had befallen the hall. The headmaster surveyed the area grimly, noting the large craters that littered the ground. The fire had melted massive amounts of ice and it ran across the ground in a slow stream, falling into trenches and pockmarks and allowing gravity to do the rest. A hole had been blasted into the ceiling at one point and the thick, angry clouds of the Winter court spat down torrents of rain, which drizzled into the suddenly silent hall as Albus approached the edge of the largest crater.

Lying on the ground below, blood dribbling from his mouth and his tattered brown robe frayed and singed in many places was Harry Potter. His emerald eyes were weary and filled with pain yet they focused on Albus easily enough and the boy was able to give him a ghost of his usual satisfied smirk. Cradled in his arms was Amanda Carpenter, who was whimpering slightly, her leg bent in an unnatural

way. Dumbledore briefly looked over them and turned to the second thing of interest in the crater.

The slack and fear-filled eyes of Lady Maeve met his own and Dumbledore squared his shoulders grimly. For all her beauty, Maeve's features were ugly and spiteful in death and her fingers were curved into a claw-like position, as if she had attempted to rip into something a moment before her death. Blood pooled from a large gouge in her chest, where the remnants of silvery Soulfire continued to burn amidst her torn and bloodied flesh.

There was no denying it.

The Winter Lady was dead.

Harry knew that he should be in an exponential amount of pain at the moment, especially when he evaluated his condition and noted the various wounds and injuries he had sustained. Luckily for him, Meciél had numbed up his entire body as a victory present and all he could feel was a pleasant haze. It did make movement a tad troublesome but Harry didn't care as he glanced up at Dumbledore and tried to smirk.

Fuck, was he tired.

Amanda whimpered in his grip and Harry looked down, noting her broken leg and cut-up body. Had it been any other time, he would have stopped to appreciate the generous amount of cleavage that the blonde girl was showing through her tattered Hogwarts robes. Given the circumstance, Harry only looked a couple of times before he hauled them both up to their feet.

'Oh, my beloved little host,' Meciél murmured and he could feel her happiness, her satisfaction. Invisible hands stroked his hair and leaned against his back. 'You have succeeded, Harry. You are free now. We shall never be apart like that again, do you hear me? Never again.'

"You're so clingy," Harry grumbled under his breath but a smile tugged on his lips. Amanda shivered underneath him and Harry

frowned, finally noticing that the both of them were drenched in water, which continued to run over the edge of the large crater in little mini-waterfalls.

That led him to another problem.

The walls of the crater were at least nine metres high, bigger than a two story house, and Harry knew that he wasn't going to be able to jump out of the cavernous hole in his condition. He sighed and, wincing in pain, focussed a slender tendril of Hellfire. His body shivered and Harry shuddered uncomfortably as he extended his large wings of bone from his back. At the moment, it was as if his body couldn't even stand the pressure of channelling magic.

Not that he blamed it. Three words must have done an enormous amount of damage on his relatively fragile body.

Using the wings as leverage, Harry slammed them into the wall of the crater and, holding Amanda tight, began to climb up the vertical wall. Dumbledore had moved away from the edge and disappeared from sight. Amanda murmured something quietly in his arms but otherwise remained still as Harry reached the top and hoisted the both of them onto the ground above. He laid her down gently and then hobbled over to Dumbledore, who was peering down at something.

When he got closer, he could see the Headmaster's object of interest.

Harry came to a stop right next to the old wizard, giving him a quick once over with his eyes. Apart from his torn robes and his blackened hand, the man was without a doubt the one who looked the least affected by the epic battle that had just taken back. Harry then glanced down and kept his face stony as he took in Amaris' still body. The bloodied wound had been partially closed over and Harry frowned, noting something clear- something that looked like ice- over her wound.

"She's still alive," Dumbledore murmured. "Although, the wound still remains fatal."

"Oh," Harry uttered. He cocked his head at that. "Oh."

Amaris was still alive. Amaris was still alive? Harry pondered that and realised that, in his emotionally exhausted state, he couldn't muster up the energy or enthusiasm for any kind of emotion. Using those Words had completely sapped the mental and physical strength from his body.

The two powerful wizards stood side by side, staring down at the delicate features of Harry's daughter. Finally, Harry peered at Dumbledore from the corner of his eyes.

"Thanks for coming for me," he grunted.

"It was no problem," Dumbledore replied politely.

Harry peered over his shoulder and surveyed the Order of Phoenix, only slightly surprised that they were there.

"It looks like it was a problem," Harry noted. He squinted. "Looks like some of them are dead, too."

"I know," Dumbledore replied quietly. "But we could not leave you in the hands of Maeve. You are still needed. The prophecy requires it."

"I'm glad you have your priorities in order," Harry remarked dryly.

Dumbledore made an apologetic noise and smoothed his beard. The Headmaster of Hogwarts seemed to be pondering something and Harry humoured him until, finally, he broke the silence.

"Well, as morbid as this is, gazing at my fatally wounded daughter, don't you think we should-" Harry paused as Dumbledore raised a hand to silence him.

"Wait."

"Wait for what?" Harry demanded, feeling the first signs of annoyance creeping into him.

“To be a Faerie Queen is to be more than title. Rather, it is a mantle- a mantle of power,” Dumbledore lectured. “When one queen dies, this mantle is transferred to the nearest available receptacle and that person becomes the new Queen.”

Harry took this in and his eyes widened.

“Wait, you mean that...?”

He broke off when a sudden blue flash of light filled his gaze. Something surged past him, an invisible mass of energy that lifted the hairs on his arm and caused his skin to tingle in apprehension. He glanced away, shielding his gaze as the light grew brighter and brighter. He was vaguely aware of Dumbledore standing resolute before his vision was taken from him and all he could see was pure, blue light. Then, it all abruptly disappeared and Harry opened his eyes again. He glanced down and his heart skipped a beat.

Amaris’ green eyes, identical to his in every way, stared back at him blankly. Harry started and shifted back a step, shock flooding his system. His heart pounded in his ears as Amaris calmly stood up, regarding her wound carefully. She raised her slim hand and ice crawled across the ground, slithering up to her bloody stomach wound and flash-freezing it in a second. Amaris cocked her head and appeared satisfied as she- slowly- staggered to her feet.

Harry watched her with wide eyes while Dumbledore stood there calmly, his wand in his hand and clasped loosely to his side. The Headmaster appeared to be ready for anything but Harry literally gaped as his daughter brushed off her shoulders and turned towards him.

“Amaris!” Harry breathed.

Amaris opened her mouth to respond, and then paused. She let out a rough, hacking cough and doubled over. Droplets of red liquid stained the ice as Amaris finished her cough. She looked up weakly and Harry winced at the sight of her bloodstained mouth.

“Father,” she murmured hoarsely. “I am glad to see that you are safe.”

At the sound of her voice, Harry’s mind flashbucked to his captivity and he tensed. His emotions were surging through him turbulently. Anger and rage over her treatment of him quarrelled with his reluctant happiness that she was still alive. On the one hand, Harry was glad that he hadn’t killed his own flesh and blood, that the little eight-year old girl that he had looked after and had grown fond of at one point was still alive. On the other hand, he could barely stand to look at her, for the urge to cock his fist and break her fucking nose was becoming more and more insistent.

“Lady...Amaris,” Dumbledore greeted quietly.

Amaris regarded him for a moment.

“You are nothing to me,” she said blandly. “Be gone, and take your servants with you. I grant you this act of mercy from the kindness of my heart.”

Harry couldn’t help but snort. “Yeah right,” he muttered. “Kindness? Where’d you get that from? Your mother was a psychopathic bitch and I’m a sociopathic serial killer. You didn’t get it from either of us.”

Amaris’s lips twitched.

Dumbledore suddenly stiffened. “They are coming,” he said in alarm and spun around. Harry followed his gaze.

All around the hallway, long, thin cracks were appearing in the air. Portals from other regions of the Nevernever appeared in the dozens and tall, pale faced and well-dressed Sidhe were stepping out of them. Many of them were dressed in fancy garb but Harry saw that a lot of them wore fine, gleaming armour of black-ice and carried hefty swords or spears of bronze or copper. Dumbledore made a motion to the Order and they must have recognised it because they stood down. Harry wasn’t paying any attention to that though as he turned back to Amaris, his eyes narrowed dangerously.

"I ain't gonna go quietly," he promised.

"This is not my doing," Amaris murmured and stepped past him.

Suddenly, the atmosphere of the place shifted and Harry grunted as an overwhelming pressure came across him. His mouth parted in shock and pure, undiluted terror filled his eyes as the wrath of an immense being was focussed upon him. His heart surged, his eyes wide with panic, and he was forced to his knees as the ice cracked around his form. Never before had he felt such power, never!

'Hellfire!' Meciél uncharacteristically cursed within his mind and Hellfire flooded his pained body. Whatever she did, the feelings of terror and panic dimmed until they became a background throb in his head. 'Harry, beloved, we are in trouble.'

'What the hell was that?' Harry demanded, unable to lift his head off the ground.

'A glamour,' Meciél replied grimly. 'An illusion in part, although the sheer power that you felt was undeniably real. Remember how the Winter Court has three queens? Your dealings only extended to the youngest and weakest of them all- the Lady. The one who approaches us, she is the real power of Winter.'

'Can I kick her arse?'

'She is as strong as I am, perhaps stronger,' Meciél replied quietly. 'And that is when I am not bound within the Void. She has the power of an old god and could match an Archangel in strength and skill.'

The presence was coming closer yet Harry was still unable to lift his head off the ground. He gritted his teeth and began to summon the full might of Hellfire to strengthen him.

'I think she's pissed,' Harry thought grimly.

'Maeve was her daughter.'

"Fuck!" Harry cursed.

"Hmm, maybe later, dear," a smooth voice said amusedly. It had an accent that Harry couldn't quite place, somewhat European and somewhat different from anything he had heard before. Abruptly, the pressure on Harry ceased and he quickly jumped to his feet, preparing to launch a devastating Word upon the new enemy- entirely aware that the backlash would probably harm himself more than it would harm her.

Never let it be said that Harry would go without fighting. Not after experiencing Winter's hospitality.

Harry's eyes widened and he paused as he took in the sight before him. Every Winter Sidhe was on his or her knees save one, who stood next to a prostrating Amaris with a superior and almost amused expression on her face. She had white hair, not white-blond or platinum but pure, white as snow hair. Her skin somehow looked paler than her long hair. Her oblique eyes were a deep green that tinted to blue when she tilted her head to look upon Harry, while her features were not old. They were not young either, they just were.

Her blue and silver silken dress breezed around her ankles, hovering above the ground yet never touching it, as if the woman herself refused to be dirtied like that. Harry swallowed hard and glanced away, trying to regain his bearings. Yet, the scent of her perfume washed over him, something wild and rich, heavy and sweet and Harry sighed in annoyance.

"Your glammers are good," Harry praised, avoiding the sight of Faerie Queen before him- for what else could she be. "Really, really good. Perfect, in fact."

Harry could hear the Faerie Queen smile.

"You are mistaken," she replied and her voice was like velvet and honey. "I don't need little tricks like that."

"Queen Mab, Lady of Air and Darkness, Embodiement of Winter, your royal majesty," Dumbledore greeted quietly and Harry saw the old

man bow deeply before the woman. Reluctantly, he turned his head and watched. "I am honoured to meet you."

Instantly, Mab's entire demeanour changed. Her face went slack and utterly dead and her eyes glittered with inhuman emotion as she regarded Dumbledore. His back itched as he peered past the woman's face, seeing something so totally inhuman and just so different that it made him want to squirm. All Fae had that particular quality in one way or another, but this woman breathed it.

"Albus Dumbledore," she spoke and Dumbledore rocked at the sound of his name being uttered by this woman. "Child of Summer, Chosen of Phoenix." She smiled at that, cruel and nastily. "I both commend and condemn you attempts to distract me. You, of all people, should not want my eye on you. Yet, it goes to your level of commitment to your little servant that you attempt to shield him from me."

Dumbledore remained quiet, his eyes briefly meeting Harry's. Harry himself had the sinking feeling that the old man had absolutely no idea as what to do. Queen Mab regarded the Headmaster for a moment longer and then strolled past him. She walked to the edge of the large crater and stared down as rain and little bit of debris continued to fall from the gaping hole in the roof. Harry had no doubt what she was looking at and winced. The Queen was silent as Harry and Dumbledore waited in a tense silence. Amaris had risen and was very pale- even more pale than usual. Harry could see a trickle of blood dripping from her wound and frowned.

"I see," Queen Mab eventually said at last, not a hint of emotion revealed in her tone. "My daughter is dead."

After a moment's silence, Amaris stepped forward. "That is true, your majesty," she offered. "Lady Maeve has fallen in battle. Her mantle was passed upon to me, her daughter of flesh and blood. I am Amaris Potter. I am the new Winter Lady."

Queen Mab turned and appraised Amaris carefully. "Granddaughter of my flesh and blood, you are wounded," she observed. "Who did this to you?"

"It is complicated," Amaris hesitated. "I was struck by cold iron."

"And who wielded it?"

"A spell by my father here, Harry Potter, caused this wound," Amaris answered and Harry could have sworn that she sounded reluctant to answer. She was quick to clarify, however. "But..."

She was silenced as Queen Mab raised a hand and her gaze came to rest upon Harry. "Then, who landed the mortal blow against my daughter? Was it you, Child of Summer? Or was it you, Child of the Void?"

The question was so loaded that Harry wouldn't have been surprised if Dumbledore decided to have a fit. He paused and closed his eyes, taking a deep breath and steeling himself for what was to come. Meciell buzzed in his mind encouragingly as Harry wrapped his tired and battered body in Hellfire and strengthened himself.

"I heard the question but can I just clarify?" Harry spoke up and his voice sounded as cocky as ever. "Are you asking who killed the vicious and cruel and slutty bitch down there? The one who raised his wand and gladly watched as the life fled from that whore's eyes? If you are, then that'd be me."

Absolute silence hung in the air. Very slowly, Dumbledore turned his head and gazed at Harry with a look of utter incredulity. Amaris too turned to him and quite literally gaped at him. At any other time, Harry would have been satisfied to have finally gotten a strong emotion out of the normally stoic girl but his focus rested entirely on Queen Mab, who was staring at him blankly.

"Brave words," she uttered quietly.

Harry rolled his eyes and stepped forward. "Either way, I killed Maeve and I really, really liked doing it," he answered honestly. "I can either be meek and humble or I can be upfront and bold about it. Either way, if you want to kick my arse then you will and, frankly, I simply cannot be fucked putting up with anymore bullshit on my part. If you hadn't noticed, it's been a really busy day."

Queen Mab continued to stare at him quietly. "What if I take offense at your brutish manner and decide to make an example out of you?"

"Then I'll just have to try to kill you," Harry declared boldly and grinned hopefully at her. "Besides, I'm kind of resting my chances that you like somebody being spunky. You know, that whole cliché and everything."

Queen Mab nodded calmly and then, to Harry's great relief, she smiled in amusement. Human emotion flooded back into her face and Harry exhaled noisily, raking a hand through his hair as the atmosphere abruptly lightened.

"I'm so glad that worked," he muttered to himself.

"You're right, boy," Queen Mab murmured. "I do like spunk. You're not afraid to speak your mind and, in a way, I can respect that."

"You can?" Harry asked in surprise.

"Oh yes," Queen Mab answered and something flashed through her green feline-eyes. "Anybody who is foolish enough to speak their mind in front of the Queen of Air and Darkness must obviously be mentally deficient. For such a creature to survive into adulthood, let alone command the ability to walk, is impressive in itself."

Harry blinked at that and stared at the Queen with an unreadable emotion. Then, a small chuckle escaped his lip. "Man, I gotta remember that one," he said. "Except, you know, I'll do it better."

"I am pleased that you enjoy my wit," Queen Mab said, still smiling as she stood on the ledge above the crater. "Perhaps you will enjoy your time with me when I take you away from here and punish you for murdering my daughter!"

The moment the words had left her lip, Harry reacted. Close enough to the Queen to reach her, a single wing of bone snapped from his back and zoomed through the air. Mab didn't even blink as a sharp blade of bone stopped mere millimetres from her throat. Harry

regarded her with a scowl, his eyes beginning to burn with Hellfire as emotion flared through his body. There was no way in hell that Harry was going to let himself get captured again!

"Please," somebody broke in and he recognised his daughter's voice. Harry kept his gaze on Queen Mab, who looked somewhat humoured by his defiance. "My Lady, your majesty, grant me the boon of your ear?"

Queen Mab slowly nodded, bringing her head up and down and almost-but not quite- impaling herself on Harry's wing. Harry heard scuffling feet as Amaris came to stand up by his side and remained still when his daughter bowed her head.

"My Queen, I respectfully request that you allow Harry Potter and his company to go free," Amaris spoke quietly and there was a hint of pleading in her voice that made Harry feel surprised. "I regret to tell you that Lady Maeve was not entirely loyal to you, my Queen. She subverted the will of Winter on many occasions and tapped into power sources not appropriate for one of her station. It is my belief that she intended to attempt to overthrow you and take your position."

"What, Maeve overthrow Mab?" Harry asked in scorn. "Please, she wasn't that good." He finished with a grunt and couldn't help but glance down as Amaris removed her elbow, her eyes never leaving her Queens.

"You're not helping your cause, Father," Amaris muttered underneath her breath.

"Bite me, brat," Harry muttered back.

Queen Mab looked amused at their byplay and pondered Amaris for quite some time. Harry, his body tense and filled to the brim with Hellfire, twitched impatiently as his muscles flexed in preparation. Finally, Queen Mab looked up and nodded her head, her pale skin once again coming only scant millimetres from touching sharp bone.

"Very well, granddaughter of blood and flesh," she murmured. "I grant you your request. Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore," she

practically spat out. "are free to go without reprisal. Their servants may leave with them without fear of harm for their action here today."

"I thank you, my Queen," Amaris bowed.

Mab turned her feline-slanted eyes upon Harry. "You know that my kind, small or big, is unable to lie. You can trust my word. I will allow you to leave."

Harry slowly retracted his wing of bone but immediately felt suspicious. "Hang on," he demanded quizzically. "Amaris just alludes to that and we're free to go? Just like that?"

"What can I say? Perhaps I make decisions on a whim," Mab responded dryly. She lifted a hand and Harry tensed as she stroked his cheek. He awaited a host of glammers but strangely enough none came. "You amuse me, boy, and you are my son-in-law. Do I need another reason?"

"Father," Amaris whispered. "Let. It. Drop."

Harry narrowed his eyes but cautiously backed away from the Queen, who seemed more than willing to let him go. He glanced around and saw that Dumbledore was approaching the Order, instructing them in a quiet and firm voice as what to do. He moved to join him when a slender hand clutched and his tattered robes.

"Father," Amaris murmured. "You are leaving now, yes?"

"I am," Harry said curtly. He still wasn't sure how to act around his daughter.

"You are angry with me." It was not a question. "I have hurt you, just like Mother did."

"Yep," Harry answered tightly and between clenched teeth.

Amaris cocked her head. "I do not wish you to be angry with me," she told him and her lips twitched. "Is there anything I can do about it? I will accept any and all of your punishments."

Harry turned and gazed at her furiously. The pent up emotions that he thought he had spent in his fight against Maeve rose up within him until it felt like he would explode. In a remarkable act of self control, Harry gestured at Amaris' wound.

"Will that kill you?" He asked grimly.

"I have quite some time before the wound will prove fatal," Amaris answered calmly. "I have suspended my injuries with my new powers. I shall have it examined and healed later."

Harry nodded. "Good," he muttered darkly. Then, he reared his hand back and slapped Amaris across the cheek with all of his Hellfire-enhanced strength.

Amaris rocked back under the blow but managed to keep her footing. She slowly adjusted herself and turned back to Harry, one of her pale cheeks already beginning to bruise. She said nothing as Harry glared down at her, and did not protest when Harry slapped her again. She righted herself but was unprepared when Harry backhanded her and sent her sprawling to the ground.

"Do you feel better yet?" Amaris asked quietly from her position, her voice giving no indication if she was feeling pain.

"No," Harry replied grimly and watched as Amaris hefted herself up. "You have no idea what I feel, Amaris, absolutely no fucking idea."

Amaris nodded and stood there quietly. She looked meek and timid as Harry raised his hand again. His entire body screamed at him to deliver a square punch to her face but, with a disgusted growl, his lowered his arm and merely flicked her across the nose.

"You're a dumbarse brat for listening to your mother," Harry snapped. "For the record, I did not appreciate the mindfucks you tried to give me. Do you understand?"

Amaris frowned. "You misunderstand me," she said clearly and without emotion. "Everything I told you within those chambers was the truth. Father, I do love you."

"You're a Fae," Harry deadpanned. "You don't love."

"I do," Amaris insisted. She took a step forward, invading his personal space and Harry shifted uncomfortable on his feet. "Father. Stay here with me."

"What?"

"Mother is dead. You have nothing to fear," Amaris reassured him. "I am the new Winter Lady. You are safe in my domain. Here, you can gain power and strength. Here, you can have an army to do your bidding. Here, you can be safe. Here," she paused. "Here, you can be with your family. Do not leave me, Father."

Harry was silent. He regarded his daughter carefully and suddenly felt very, very tired. He was tired of it all, the Fae mind games and the second guessing, but the idea of a safe haven here was appealing to him. But, in the end, he knew that he couldn't and something must have shown on his face because Amaris closed her eyes in defeat and let out a soft sigh.

"You will not stay."

"Nope," Harry answered softly.

"Very well," Amaris conceded and touched Harry gently on the arm. "But remember this, Father. For as long as I am alive, I will always love you. You are my Father and you will always be welcome here in my domain. Remember that for as long as you live."

Harry hesitated as Amaris closed in on him for a hug. He rolled his eyes and sighed but his lips twitched reluctantly as he enclosed his arms around his daughter and returned her affectionate gesture. Her body was cold but Harry could feel heat beneath the surface, the little nugget of humanity buried somewhere down there. He rested his chin on her head and exhaled noisily.

"Amaris?" he said quietly.

"Yes, Father?"

"Don't ever betray me again," he warned and stroked her hair.
"Because if you do I will kill you."

"I understand."

"Man," Harry groaned. "You're just lucky I've gone all soft and pathetic on you."

Amaris blinked.

"Harry?"

Harry looked over Amaris and saw Dumbledore waiting patiently beside a glowing portal. The rest of the Order of Phoenix had already gone and the Knights of the Cross were nowhere in sight. Harry took a deep breath and pulled away from Amaris. With a last lingering touch, his daughter stepped back and took one last look at Amaris. Then, he turned his gaze to Mab's superior gaze and smirked.

"I really, really hope that we never meet again," he murmured. He turned around and followed Dumbledore through the portal, away from the Nevernever and back to the mortal world. Mab's reply travelled with him and he couldn't help but shudder when he heard them.

"I promise you- we will."

Amaris stood by her Grandmother's side as the portal to the mortal world vanished and the split in the air sealed up. The two Faerie Queens were silent as Mab turned back to gaze upon the fallen form of her daughter. Amaris cocked her head and looked at her dead mother dispassionately. She could not conjure up an emotion, either good or bad, at the sight of Maeve's dull eyes and bloodied chest. As she analysed herself carefully, she thought that she could detect a hint of relief- but it was a very shaky hypothesis and she discarded it.

immediately. Finally, Mab turned to Amaris and the slender Fae was shaken out of her musings.

“Well played, dear granddaughter,” Mab, Queen of Air and Darkness, murmured. She raised a pale and perfectly manicured hand and tapped Amaris on the head in a awkward display of human affection.

Amaris knew an insult when she saw it but allowed it to slide by. She had no interest in bartering and jibing with a being far more powerful than she is. Blood only runs so far, after all.

“I thank you,” Amaris answered instead and Mab may have looked a tad disappointed.

“Has it all been arranged?” Mab asked, gesturing at Maeve. “I do not want any of her conspirators to escape unharmed.”

“I have sent out loyal servants to apprehend them, your majesty,” Amaris answered blankly. “Mother’s treachery will come to an end tonight. They will learn that nobody betrays the Winter Court, no matter what their station.”

Mab smiled chillingly and Amaris suppressed a shudder at the fearful sight. “My daughter and her little followers have been dealt with. How wonderful.” She cast her gaze down at Amaris, who continued to stare at her dead mother. “Everything has gone exactly as planned. You are the Winter Lady. This treachery has been uprooted. Your...father...is safe.”

Mab’s hands trailed down her granddaughter’s chest but unlike Maeve, there was nothing sexual about as the Faerie Queen carefully examined the wound on Amaris’s chest. It was frozen solid, sealed with the power of Winter.

“Your wound is unexpected,” she concluded at last. “Nonetheless, it is not fatal. I shall have it examined by my most trusted advisors. I did not expect Maeve to so blatantly sacrifice you as she did. Perhaps she became suspicious when reinforcements did not immediately arrive. Perhaps she saw that your usefulness had come to an end.”

Amaris nodded faintly, her expression unreadable even to the Great Queen of Winter. Mab just shook her head and smiled faintly in amusement as her hand dropped back to her side. The two stood side by side until a fast blur of silver zoomed into the room and a little faery dropped onto Amaris' head.

"My Queen," Cessbulby intoned quietly. The usual eagerness and hyperactivity that the little Fae was known for was gone, replaced by a solemn, respectful tone. "My Lady."

"Taking in strays?" Mab asked. She appraised the small, pink-haired being once and then glanced away, as if dismissing her as irrelevant. "How...human...of you."

"She proved useful," Amaris defended herself mildly. "In fact, she was a key instrument here today."

Mab inclined one of her pale eyebrows but said no more on the matter. "I am curious though, how were you so sure that Albus Dumbledore would attempt a rescue attempt for the boy? Yes, he is more powerful than the average wand-wizard but I do not see why the effort was needed."

The glint in her eyes proved that she was very well aware of the facts, leaving Amaris to conclude that it was a test of some kind. She was unsure. Even now, at the end of it all, Fae culture still confused her. Human culture did too, she supposed. Nonetheless, she answered.

"Dumbledore was going to come. He needs Harry Potter," Amaris said quietly. "He had no other choice. It was only a matter of when. I had to ensure that he would arrive safely, hence, I instructed my servant to pass on my directions. It proved adequate."

Mab looked pleased.

"However," Amaris continued and eyed Mab blankly. "It would not be wise to underestimate the powers of my father. Many have done so and none have lived to tell of it. Mother is merely single name of a very large list."

Amaris couldn't decipher Mab's expression as she finished her sentence. Instead, she gave Cess an affectionate pat on the head and silently bowed her head to Mab in an unspoken request to leave. Mab waved her off with a single hand and Amaris departed from her side. As she walked across the deserted warzone, Mab called out after her.

"I am surprised to find that you have befuddled me," the Queen of Air and Darkness admitted. "When you came to me, I first thought that you wanted the mantle of Lady for yourself and your Mother's betrayal was merely an excuse. Now, I cannot determine if you killed your mother for power...or if you killed her because she was going to take away your toy."

Amaris paused in her step. For the first time since Queen Mab had arrived, she felt a stirring of emotion within her chest. It annoyed her.

"My Father is not a toy," she replied quietly.

"Of course not," Mab agreed. "After all, you love him. Or, do you? He is powerful. He would make an excellent ally in the future should you need him and I have no doubt that he would come if you called. Once again, I cannot tell what you really want from him."

"I know you can't," Amaris answered without turning back. She picked up at her pace and her words drifted back to her grandmother with ease. "That is why you and I are very different from each other."

"Oh, I have no doubt," Mab murmured to herself and turned back to her daughter's corpse, almost sadly. "I have no doubt at all about that."

Hogwarts glimmered beautifully in the night and moonlight bounced off the Great Lake, casting an eerie glow around the large grounds. In the Hospital Wing, Harry Potter was awoken from his slumber from the instinctual knowledge that somebody was standing close to him. He slightly edged his head and saw a shadowed, feminine form standing above him.

"I was so worried," Amanda whispered to him. "I didn't know what had happened to you. I almost felt like crying."

Harry was silent as Amanda sat on the edge of his bed. Her hand came forward and he did not resist when she began to stroke his hair.

"You were right, you know," she told him softly. "Meciel, she really does love you. She loves you more than I can comprehend. I could feel it when she was inside of me and, you know, it really got me thinking. What do I feel compared to that?"

The bitterness was easily apparent in her voice and although a dozen blithe and sardonic retorts came to his mind, Harry didn't say a word. Deep within his mind, Meciel stirred and clung to his mental presence tighter, her warm presence basking his consciousness with her affection.

"Do I love you, Harry?" Amanda asked him but she clearly was not expecting an answer. "Or do I have a crush on you? What do I want? What can I do?"

"You could shut up and stop bothering me," Harry murmured sleepily and then frowned when he found himself instantly regretting it.

"I...I could do that," Amanda sounded hesitant and Harry could picture her standing there, biting her lip and looking frazzled in her indecision- although what she was indecisive about Harry had no idea.

He opened his mouth to say something when she shifted and sprawled down next to him, her face just scant centimetres from his. He swallowed, feeling odd, as Amanda's warm body pressed against his. He could smell her and was suddenly very aware of her presence.

"I...um..." Amanda cleared her throat nervously. When she spoke again, she sounded more determined and her voice was firmer. "I don't know what I feel," she confessed. "But...but...I do know what I want?"

Her sentence ended in a question as she slowly placed an arm around his shoulders. Harry stiffened and inclined his head so he was staring at her blurry form from the corner of his eye. Slowly, as if she was still unsure of her own actions, Amanda leaned forward and kissed him hesitantly. Harry returned it eagerly and she broke apart, gasping for breath. Even in the darkness, her blush was evident. Harry reached up and cupped her chin.

"This isn't going to go anywhere," he felt compelled to warn despite himself.

"Just...just shut up and kiss me!"

Harry's eyes widened but he was not one to disagree as she slithered up his body and captured his lips once again. With a sudden growl, Harry rolled over and ignored her sudden squeak as he pressed himself against her curvy body and ran his hands through her thick, golden hair.

Who was he to argue with the brat?

A/N: Hey guys. It's been a while, huh? The first scene of this has been done for nearly a month, probably longer, but I got stuck on the second part and was just blocked. I surged through it the other day and I finally got it done. I've also completed the next chapter and I'm just waiting for the usual gang at DLP to go over the spelling and grammar. Also, I seem to be getting a lot of PM's regarding the Wheel of Time stories I have up. Unfortunately, I have no plans to continue them at all. After the Denarian Lord is finished (and it has less than ten chapters left) I have plans to start working on an original series of fiction that I've been putting quite a lot of thought into. A lot of it's actually going to be similar to the concepts in the Denarian Trilogy, including Words of the World, magic, things living in people's heads, etc, etc. I still don't know if I'll publically post it or refine it until it could potentially be fit for publishing.

Harry was not used to waking up next to a warm and soft body next to him. Granted, it wasn't the first time he had sex (and if he had anything to say about it, it wouldn't be the last) but having sex with somebody and snuggling- for lack of a better word- next to somebody were two very different things. For one thing, snuggling generally involved going to sleep and Harry was always a big fan of waking up, something that might prove to be difficult if his partner were an assassin.

Just because he was paranoid didn't mean that the woman he had just ploughed wasn't be a shape shifter or elite assassin that wanted to rip his heart out and use his entrails in a demonic summoning that would consume his soul.

It had almost happened once. But Harry didn't want to think about that again. Meciél hadn't shut up for days afterward.

This was why Harry was faintly surprised at himself and at Meciél when he awoke from his slumber to the sound of a door closing loudly and the feeling of a pair of wonderfully perky objects pressed into his ribs and a mane of glimmering blonde hair resting on his shoulder. The barely concealed and very delectable schoolgirl murmured something sleepily and wriggled into him even further.

Harry watched her with bemusement before the events of last night came rushing back at him, and he smacked himself in the forehead with his palm.

“Right,” he murmured to himself. “I...whatzitt...er...banged! Right. I banged the blonde brat. Yeah...”

Strangely amused at the entire situation, Harry carefully shuffled out of Amanda’s grip and rubbed his eyes. The last thing he wanted to do was to wake the girl up, especially in this unfamiliar situation. Knowing how annoying she was, Harry just wasn’t prepared for the questions or the awkward glances that she was bound to give him. He glanced around the room sleepily and nodded his greetings to Michael, who had just come to a stop at the foot of his bed with dawning look of horror creeping over his face.

“Yo, Mr-Compensating-For-His-Small-Penis-With-A-Broadsword,” he greeted unenthusiastically as his mental faculties began to grind once more. He made a face. “Gah. That’s a bit of a mouthful, isn’t it? Why don’t you go ahead and change your name to something like chicken-dick or something? There are fewer hyphens that way.”

Turning his head, Harry surveyed his bare chest, noting with surprise that his deteriorated muscles and thinning flesh had been restored as if he were in the peak of his health. Actually, now that Harry thought about it, he felt great- better than he had in months. Or days. Or whatever unit of time Harry had been stuck in the damp, cold dungeons of the Winter Lady. He shivered and something cold came across him and the Denarian Lord quickly pulled his thoughts away from that particular topic.

Other people might need a psychiatrist. Harry just wanted to forget the whole thing, be content in the knowledge that the treacherous whore was dead and move onto killing bigger and badder things in his life.

“Hey, have you seen my wand?” Harry asked the stoic Knight as he rummaged through the bedside cabinet. He frowned when his search turned up empty and rolled his eyes. “Fucking hell. Hey, brat,” Harry

called loudly and poked Amanda in the stomach. She stirred but remained still. “Look, Amanda, have you...seen...my...daughter...father...”

The circumstances and the actual identity of the person standing over him had suddenly hit him and, very slowly, Harry turned his head and gazed back at Michael, very aware of possible impending danger. A large weight sunk in his gut as the Father of the teenage girl he had just had sex with gazed back at him with steely eyes. Michael was a big man with very broad shoulders and Harry was aware that the Knight's hand was resting casually on the hilt of a very dangerous sword- one that could sever him in two with great ease.

Shit.

Slowly, Harry turned back to Amanda and lifted the mass of blonde hair on his shoulder. He found Amanda's peaceful, sleepy face underneath it all and winced as the identity of the girl was all but confirmed for him. He exhaled wearily, lowered the hair and turned back to Michael. Opening his mouth, Harry caught a flash of something flicker through the Knight's eyes and abruptly closed his mouth.

The next couple of minutes were very awkward for the Denarian as he sat on his bed, only a bedsheet covering his modesty, while Michael just stood there with that look of judgement. To his credit, Harry never really had seen the man look so...whatever...and actually felt a slither of fear creep into his gut. Could he win against a Knight of the Cross without any clothes and missing his wand?

And when the hell was the man going to actually speak or do something?”

“Well.” Harry coughed. “Wow. Er...This is...this is awkward, yeah? Um...would you believe me if I told you that...that this isn't what it looks like?”

Michael stared back at him flatly.

“Okay,” Harry said quickly and nodded quickly. “We have that cleared up. Good. See, this is progress here; nice, calm, reasonable progress.” He glanced at the white curtains that surrounded the bed, idly noting how well they obscured the vision of anybody who might be around to notice an attempted murder. “Then, and I know this is sort of stretching it, but... would you possibly believe that I slipped and fell?”

‘Yes, Harry,’ Meciél reared in his head for the first time that morning. There was silent laughter in her voice and her very presence was radiating her amusement and enjoyment at Harry’s predicament. ‘You tripped with your pants down and your penis somehow managed to find its way into the daughter of a Knight of the Cross. I can see that happening.’

“You fell,” Michael repeated sharply, speaking for the first time he had walked in. His nostrils flared. “You fell...and you were naked and my daughter...and Amanda...” he choked at the end and Harry winced as the Knight pinched the bridge of his nose and muttered something in Latin.

‘It’s an old bible verse dictating the virtues of patience,’ Meciél helpfully translated for him. ‘There’s also a reminder of ‘Thou shall not kill’ at the end.’

‘Right. Very helpful. Thanks for that. Go away now.’

Harry refocussed his eyes and his muscles tensed as Michael focussed his attention on him. Harry cut the man off before he could say anything.

“As awkward as this is,” Harry began quietly. “I should remind you that, one, your daughter is sleeping next to me and might get caught in the crossfire and, two, I am a Denarian Lord of unparallel power who could easily smite a single, lone Knight- even if I am naked.”

Michael clenched his jaw and opened his mouth to say something, but he was cut off as something behind the curtains rustled. Harry’s initial sigh of relief faded away as somebody brushed back the white

sheets of fabric and Sanya peered into the little space around the hospital bed.

“Michael? Did you find her?” Sanya grumbled. He paused and his eyes widened with shock as he took in Harry and his partner, the former just shaking his head in despair.

“Well, fuck you too,” Harry grumbled as he cast his eyes upwards. “Divine Intervention my arse.”

“What the...Michael, is this...Amanda and...” Sanya trailed off and a look of dawning came over his face. “Oh. Oh. Oh. I see now. Yes, I see.”

The Eastern-European Knight looked incredibly amused and Harry felt his eye twitch. “There’s no need to smirk about it, you bastard!” He snapped as Sanya took the other side of Harry’s bed. “Shit, where’s my backup when I need it?”

As if by magic, the doors to the hospital wing opened and Harry’s mood immediately rose at the sight of the long orange-robe wearing Headmaster. Hah! The old man wouldn’t let him die like this, not after he had gone to the trouble of rescuing him in the first place. Dumbledore looked strangely amused as he strode into the hospital, his waist-long beard swaying with every step.

“Ah, good morning, Sanya and Michael,” greeted Dumbledore airily as he approached Harry’s bed. “If I may have a moment of your...”

Harry watched on shrewdly as Dumbledore’s eyes paused over Harry and Amanda and widened dramatically in surprise. Silver eyebrows hit the top of his forehead and the Headmaster genuinely looked shocked. Then, his eyes twinkled merrily and a rather light smile crossed his wrinkled face. For a moment, Harry was almost convinced that Dumbledore had no idea what had happened last night until he had just walked in. But, he knew the man and, for all his best attempts, the Headmaster was radiating just the tiniest bit of smugness and cheerfulness that gave him away. There was no way that the wily old man had no idea of what had happened in the

Hospital Wing in his own school, and now he was just milking it for all it was worth.

It was what he would have done, albeit a little more bluntly. Harry had quickly come to realise that, like him, Dumbledore absolutely loved his dramatics.

“Yo, Dumbledore,” Harry greeted lazily with a wave of his hand, while his eyes narrowed at Dumbledore’s twinkling gaze. “Remember when you told me to find a girl and relax? Well, I took your advice- so, really, this is all your fault. Michael, Sanya, sick ‘im!”

For Harry, it seemed as if the men were debating with their moral and, hell forbid, good side over whether or not to eviscerate Harry. On the one hand, they were Holy Knights charged with defending the innocent. On the other hand, Harry had just...

Harry could spot the exact moment when their thoughts hit that spot as the two of them braced themselves and began to pull out their swords. Then, Dumbledore smiled barmily and turned to Michael as if nothing was the matter.

“While I am sure that this situation is...delicate...I think you should be aware that your wife is here,” he informed Michael, who started in surprise. “She’s waiting outside.”

Shit.

“Your sons and daughters are with her. They were rather insistent on seeing Amanda.”

“Oh, c’mon!” Harry burst out with a growl. He jumped up from the bed, ignoring his nakedness as he rounded on Dumbledore. “That’s just not fair, you manipulative bastard!”

Two things happened after Harry finished yelling and he immediately winced. The first thing was Amanda letting out a loud yawn as she was jerked out of her sleep by the noise. She rubbed her eyes sleepily and sat up in the bed. She abruptly froze at the sight of the

four men around her bed, glanced down at her revealed chest and let out a startled shriek as she dived back under the covers.

The doors of the hospital wing were slammed open with great force as a fuming, enraged Charity Carpenter, mother of Amanda Carpenter, stormed in, her blonde hair glimmering in the light. Her cheeks were flushed and Harry couldn't help himself as he checked her out. It was obvious to see where the brat got her looks. Suddenly, Charity paused and Harry saw her gaping at him. He blinked and glanced down at himself. Realisation dawned upon him and he grinned.

"Yeah," he boasted. "I am a hunk, aren't I?"

"Mom! What's happened?"

"I'm coming in! Stay back, Hope! Harry, look after your sister!"

"No! I wanna see Amanda! Let...geroff me! Meanie!"

In a whirlwind of arms and legs, the rest of the Carpenter siblings burst into the room and Harry had to palm his forehead, shaking his head and muttering sourly under his breath. Charity took one last look at him and abruptly turned around, reaching down and clasping her hand over the two littlest sets of eyes.

"Yuk! Mom! He's naked!"

"Eww!"

Harry felt his eye twitch at the little boy's exclamation. "Oi! You'll look like this one day, you little brat!" he snapped.

"Don't speak to my son like that!" Charity growled at him. She rounded on her children. "Out!" She shrieked. "Out! Out! Out!"

She quickly ushered the littlest of the brood while Harry calmly draped one of his sheets over himself- to protect himself against a wrathful mother rather than to protect his modesty. Charity slammed the door shut and staked back into the room, where Harry

suppressed a wince as the woman's fury washed over him. Really, for a woman without a shred of talent she really was quite fearsome. And hot. Harry checked her out again, much to her disgust.

"For the love of God-"

Michael coughed.

"Sorry dear," Charity responded automatically. "For the love of everything that is sacred put some pants on!"

Harry made a loud scoffing noise as the blankets on his former bed quivered and a tentative head poked out from beneath the covers. "Mom?" Amanda asked hesitantly, her cheeks burning. She sounded like all of her worst nightmares were coming true. "Is...is that you?"

"A-Amanda!" Charity stuttered. "Why are you...?"

She paused. Michael cringed. Harry could practically see the gears in her head. Her two oldest sons, Daniel and Matthew, had apparently reached the same conclusion because their eyes lit up with fire and they clenched their fists in anger. The dark haired teenager, Alicia, looked disgusted- but that could have been the frequent and unwilling glances towards his sheet. Molly was absent once again.

Somebody thumped on the wall outside and Harry heard the little girl, Hope (if his memory was right...he vaguely recalled saving her life a couple of months ago) shouting out at him.

"Yuk! Mandy, you had sex with him!?"

"We didn't have..." Harry shouted back automatically but paused and frowned. "Hang on, what do you mean by him? Why wouldn't she want to have sex with me?"

"You're a bastard?" Hope offered from behind door. She paused, as if gathering up courage. "And you have a small penis!" she said challengingly.

There was a thump on the door, a chuckling laughter and Harry glowered.

“Hope!” Charity snarled in disapproval. “Get away from the door! Now!”

Harry clenched his teeth. “For the record, my penis is perfectly fine. Plus...wait. How does she know what a...oh, I get it now.” He took a breath and glared at Amanda’s older brothers. “Hope, you little girl, the penises you look at in the dirty magazines you stole from your closet-homosexual brother...they’ve all been edited. Stop looking at porn and do your homework!”

“You...you...you piece of shit!” Daniel raged.

He raised a fist and moved forward as Charity barked at him to stop—only to pause when Michael cut in calmly, reaching around and clasping Daniel’s fist. Daniel blinked and looked up at his father’s look of disappointment. The young man lowered his eyes and appeared ashamed as Michael took a deep breath and exhaled wearily.

“I understand that this is a shocking, but I think that we should keep this civil,” he emphasised the last word with a rather direct look at his sons.

“For the record, this whole overprotective demon-hating brother thing you’ve got going for is unnecessarily cliché and makes you seem like an idiot,” Harry said blandly.

Michael shot him a hard look.

“Now, again for the record, I may or may not have had sex with your daughter,” Harry continued. “Maybe. I could have. I might have. I’m not saying no...but I’m not saying no either.”

“Thanks, Harry!” came a hiss from under the blankets.

“Amanda,” Michael spoke and the huddled mass under the blankets quivered at his disappointed tone. “I am disappointed in you.”

“Amanda?” Harry asked in surprise. He frowned. “No, I didn’t have sex with Amanda.”

“What?” Michael looked surprised.

“What?” Charity exclaimed.

Amanda’s head popped out of the blankets. “What?”

Harry grinned and strode across the room. He opened the door and there Hope let out a startled cry as both her and her little brother fell into the room. Casually, Harry placed a hand upon Hope’s blonde head and tussled her hair. “Hope, darling, it’s good to see you again-sweetheart! We don’t need to deny our love any longer!”

Hope ‘eeped’ and went red. She shied away from Harry’s body, before Charity yanked her backwards and glowered at him. “Not funny, Harry!” she hissed.

“Oi. I saved her life. She decided to pay me back,” Harry deadpanned. He paced the room slowly, as if unconcerned what the Carpenter family could do to him. “What can I say? I’m a demon.”

“Harry,” Michael spoke warningly. He looked weary and was massaging his scalp tenderly. “Can you just...” He trailed off. “You give me the worst headaches.”

“To be fair, Daniel was the one who told me to,”

“What?” Daniel exclaimed when everybody looked at him. “For the love of...can’t you see what he’s doing? Why isn’t anybody going to do something about the naked Denarian? Why are you just listening to him!?”

“Shit!” Harry abruptly exclaimed. He whirled on his feet and pointed at one of the curtain-enclosed beds. “Look out!” he roared, startling everybody in the room. “It’s Nicodemus!”

Michael and Charity did not look impressed.

“Well,” Harry said and stretched his arms. “I have to go, so...” He trailed off and quickly ducked out of the room.

Charity was shaking with anger as he left and she whirled on the huddled lump under the hospital bed blankets. “Don’t think I’m done with you, Amanda Bianca Carpenter!”

Harry popped his head back in the room with a sheepish smile.

“Ah, hi,” he said uncomfortably, directing his look at Dumbledore. “My wand’s gone and I suspect- hell, I just know that it’s you. Get it back for me.”

He disappeared out of the room again.

Albus almost felt ashamed of himself as he strolled through the long hallways of Hogwarts, his eyes twinkling with merriment and his beard quavering as he chuckled to himself quietly. In a way, he felt sorry for Harry, who had probably just had to endure the worst fear of all teenage boys. On the other hand, Albus decided, Harry had long had this coming to him and, to be fair, Albus had only gone down to the hospital wing to make sure Michael did not do something he might regret later- like splitting his daughter’s boyfriend into two. It had only been a coincidence that Charity Carpenter had been in his office. As soon as the woman had been alerted to the fact that her daughter had been involved in a battle of sorts, she had become very insistent on visiting and Albus had pulled a few strings to allow the Carpenters to visit their perfectly-healthy daughter as soon as possible.

And her new boyfriend, of course.

Albus chuckled again as he rounded a corner and began to approach his office. Poor Harry.

“Yeah, yeah,” the said object of his thoughts growled in annoyance. “Just give me my wand.”

Albus smiled tolerantly as Harry clambered up from the ground. He had somehow taken one of the suits of enchanted armour and now

wore a metal breast plate that conveniently covered his shame. Albus noted with a raised eyebrow that the Denarian was also wearing an iron helm and carried one of the dulled swords that the suits of armour carried with them.

“What?” Harry asked defensively, as if he had seen the direction on Dumbledore’s thoughts. “I’d just look silly with only the armour on. Besides, swingy swords are swingy.”

“Indeed.” Albus chuckled and smoothed his beard.

He glanced casually at the Gargoyle and, like magic, the gigantic stone beast bowed its head and replied in a gravelly, stony scrape as it slid out of the way and opened up the staircase to his office. He motioned for Harry to follow him and strode up the stairs to his office, doing his very best to hide the bone-settling weariness that lingered in his old frame. Harry’s muttered curse and his not-so-subtle stab at the stone Gargoyle did a little to brighten the mood, but it was still there. He settled himself on his side of the desk and couldn’t help the relieved sigh that escaped his lips as he settled back into the cushioning and massage charms of his armchair.

Harry plonked himself down opposite him and was eying Albus critically. The Headmaster could almost see the wheels turning in the younger boy’s head and, despite his tiredness, couldn’t help but feel calculating gaze tear into his defences, peel back layer and layer of his facade and finally reveal the truth of what he really was- a tired, bitter old man. In many ways, Harry Potter was just like Tom Riddle- even more depraved, in many examples.

“You alright, you old coot?” Harry asked gruffly. He smirked at Albus, a shadow of his former arrogance and spark flickering onto his pale, shadowed face. “You look like shit. Still, that’s what you senior citizens get for pretending that you’re useful to society. Should have stayed in the home.”

Albus smiled. Harry was also far more different than Tom was. To a certain point, Albus was not one to believe in destiny or fate. Free will was a pivotal part of the human existence and you could gleam somebody’s true self from a single action rather than a lifetime of

conversations. That said, Albus couldn't help but shiver as he remembered Tom with his greedy eyes and his insatiable hunger for magic. No matter how charismatic the boy had been, Albus never could shake the suspicion that, even then, Tom had never really shown anybody even a scrap of concern or had placed somebody else first in his thoughts at any point of his life.

It was almost as if he had been born evil.

He blinked and reflexively snatched up at the scroll that zoomed at his head. He blinked as Harry waved a hand in front of his face. "Hello?" the Denarian snapped. "Yeah, try not to keep the guy with the really long sword waiting. I might get bored and start using it."

"Forgive me, Harry," Albus apologised automatically, and then had to suppress a wince. No, he could not be defensive right now. For better or worse, Harry was wounded- physically and emotionally and Dumbledore couldn't help but see opportunities for careful nudging and growth.

He truly despised himself at times but he was resigned to his fate. He had stood by once and allowed a student who he felt was untrustworthy and dangerous leave these halls once. It was his responsibility to do his best to stop that from happening again, a penance for his past crimes, to make up for Tom, for Grindelwald, for Arianna...

"I am glad to see that you have somewhat recovered," Albus began and critically analysed Harry. The boy was thin, pale and worn out even after a relaxing twelve hour sleep- well, as relaxing as it could get with a bed of two. "We had feared the worst." He cocked his head. "To be honest, I did not believe that I would ever talk to you again. At least, I would never talk to the real you."

Harry was silent, his eyes gleaming brightly in the dim office, and Albus knew that he was conversing with the Fallen. In a way, he found it ironic. Two years ago, he had been fearful of the Fallen's effect on Harry. Today, he felt it was safe to assume that it was Meciél who would temper Harry's darker impulses rather than the other way around. It was not to say that she would stop him from

doing evil, but she was reasonable where Harry was reckless- and reckless people were always the most dangerous.

“It is my sad duty to inform you that several members of the Order of Phoenix perished in the operation to free you from the Winter Lady,” Albus continued, overlooking Harry’s involuntary jerk. He knew it was less to do with the lives lost and more to do with the fact that they had been lost trying to help him.

Harry did not like to be in debt. It was a pity, because Albus needed the boy to be in debt, to be grateful to at least some aspects of the Wizarding World. He needed the boy, who would grow up one day, to remember that they had fought for him and bled for him. That type of debt does not go away easily and Harry always fulfilled his debts.

Albus would not create another monster. Not again. At the very least, Harry would abandon the Wizarding World and go his separate ways. At the very best, Albus could see the Denarian Lord stepping and fighting for what he thought was right in the future. All of this had happened before, and Albus had no doubt that it would all happen again. Perhaps, one day, when Albus had departed for adventures far away, Harry would see it in his best interests to protect the innocent- even if it was only because of a debt.

Albus did not mind. He had chosen his role because of his debt to his family. He knew Harry well enough to know that unless something drastic happened to Harry’s character, the Denarian would make a similar choice. He would hate it at times, rage against it, loathe it- just as Albus had- but he would do it.

But those were long term plans. Albus needed to focus his attention on far more urgent short-term topics.

“Nonetheless,” he murmured, without missing a beat. “You can be proud that these members put their lives on the line to protect what was right. They took a stand when they could have bowed down and accepted their defeat. That alone is worth respect.”

It was not his most subtle of probes, but he was just too tired to care.

"You can relax," Harry remarked dryly and with a tad of bitterness. "I'm still committed to killing Voldemort. No jail stint is going to change that."

He was relieved to hear that. At this critical juncture, the Order of Phoenix could not afford for Harry to disappear for another one of his holidays. Hurt as he was, Harry needed to be there to fight- no matter how much the Headmaster wanted otherwise.

It was never about wants. Just needs.

"Besides," Harry added as an afterthought. "I'm pretty sure that Maeve was working with Voldemort at the end there."

Albus took a deep breath to hide the shock that flooded through him. The Winter Lady Maeve and the Dark Lord Voldemort? That was a dangerous union, an impossible one. Unless... Dumbledore's mind, as old as it was, was still brilliant and he made the connections quite quickly. If he was not mistaken, Maeve had chosen Harry to further her agenda because Harry had a foot in both worlds. Under old treaties, the Fae could not involve themselves with normal Wizarding Folk. Harry had been a Denarian. He had not been normal. Even Dumbledore had taken steps outwards in his youth, allowing Fawkes to grasp her talons in his shoulders.

Voldemort had outdone them both. By combining his presence with the power of an Outsider, he had become a ripe target. Yes...yes...it was making sense now. Maeve dismissed Harry...if Voldemort won and became the supreme leader of the Wizarding World (and Albus had no doubt that Tom would have become anything else) would be the ear of the Winter Court, yet another way to broaden her power...yes...it all made sense now.

On the outside, he merely sighed and said, "Ah. Now I see."

He sat there, his fingers pressed against each other and his eyes partially glazed over as the warmth from the fireplace licked over his wrinkled skin. At least he was recovering his strength, regaining the powers that he would need to continue the fight. The battle had been taxing on him, breaching the fortifications of Maeve's fortress, battling

the Winter Lady herself, fending off countless of her underlings- it was almost too much for an old man like himself. Perhaps, had he been fifty years younger, twenty, even, his constitution would not be so lacking- but, Albus was not one to shy from the truth.

His incredible powers were waning.

By no means was he defenceless. Albus could still see himself at the top of the Wizarding World in decades to come. He had plenty of life left in him. But, the raging fires of Summer that had pushed him to the top were simply drying out. One day, they would be gone and soon after that Fawkes would be there to finish the bargain that had spanned over fifty years.

In a way, he was looking forward to that day. But he would not step willingly into his fate until he was certain that the school and the world he had protected for so long could survive without him. Arrogant, perhaps, but it was simple fact. Somebody needed to step up into his place, somebody who could counter threats from any world- every world.

"You know, if you're going to keep spacing out then I'm just going to leave," Harry broke into the silence with a bored expression on his face. Albus could see past the forced nonchalance and see the tiredness and bleakness returning to Harry's eyes.

He would fight, yes. On that, Albus was satisfied as a commander. But could he be satisfied as a mentor, or dare he say, friend?

"Harry," Albus murmured and cleared his throat as Harry looked up at him. "Do you want to talk about it?"

The request was denied before Harry had even spoken a word as the teenage boy rapidly shook his head and stood up. "Oh, no," Harry chuckled nervously. "No, no, no, no, no. I'm fine."

"I understand that what you went through was traumatic-" Albus began.

"I'm fine," Harry snapped loudly and Albus blinked at the forcefulness of the tone. The Denarian sighed and rubbed his eyes. "Look, I'm sure

all that group therapy and counselling shit works for normal people but it's not going to work with me. If you're really concerned, this is what you need to let me to do."

Albus sat forward.

"You need to let me go home, take a couple of days off and repress the past- fuck, I dunno how long it was," Harry declared quietly. "When I have a breakdown- and I probably will- Meciél will be there to help me through it. I'm going to get over this, Dumbledore, but I'm going to do it alone, like I always have. Can you deal with that?"

"I can," Albus said quietly.

"Awesome," Harry replied softly. He fiddled with his wand and tapped a quill in his hands. Albus immediately flicked his own wand and created a temporary lift on the wards of his office, allowing Harry take his portkey and leave for wherever he wanted to go.

The Headmaster took a deep breath, sighed and then stood up. Harry was not the only one who needed his rest and Albus was sure that he would need all of his strength for the times to come. The fight was not over yet. The old man sighed and felt incredibly ancient as he began to slowly climb the stairs to his chambers. The fight was never over.

“Well, well, well,” the pale-skinned boy drawled, two large, burly boys flanking his sides. He attempted a sneer but the shadows under his eyes merely made him look tired and frustrated. “Who do we have here?”

“Hmm?” Harry Potter looked up from where he was leaning comfortably on the wall and squinted his eyes at him in thought. “Ah, you. I remember you.” He paused. “Didn’t I smash your face in that one time? Yeah. That was fun.”

Malfoy tried to hide a flush of embarrassment and the two boys on his cracked their knuckles threateningly, looming over Harry’s much slimmer frame. For his part, Harry looked distinctly unimpressed as he dismissed them as a threat and turned away. He peeked around the corner, scanning the hallway leading to the Great Hall with great care and trying his best to ignore the pangs of his stomach as the tantalising smell drifted through the air. He could not allow her to find him.

On the one hand, he was very hungry. Dumbledore’s reintroduction to Word Awesomeness 101 had been very draining. If Harry didn’t know better, he would have thought that the old man had been especially hard on him for not contacting him on his holiday. Hell, it had only been for a month and Harry thought the do-gooder would have been happy. He hadn’t even had the chance to kill a single person! Still, ‘forced’ therapy consisting of large beaches, small bikinis and cocktails mixed with pineapple and banana had left him in a rather placating mood and he had generously allowed Dumbledore to vent.

‘Yes,’ Meciell replied to his thought in amusement and Harry winced when she ceased disrupting his neural pathways, allowing a barrage of pain signals to bombard his brain all at once and allowing him to feel the aches and bruises all of his chest. ‘Truly, you are as humble as you are magnificent for allowing the most powerful wizard of the last thousand years to keep his ego.’

“I am magnificent,” Harry agreed thoughtfully. In the corner of his eye, he noticed Malfoy throwing questioning looks at his two bodyguards, as if he had no idea what Harry was on about, and he sighed. “Seriously, are you still here? Go away already.”

"I don't take orders from you!" Malfoy spat out and Harry sighed.

"What is wrong with this school?" he muttered to himself, raking a hand through his hair. He rounded on Malfoy with an annoyed scowl, forcing the blonde boy to take a step back. "I need to know, dipshit. Do you hunt me down and come and find me to deliberately provoke me so you can look bad and I can look cool?"

"What?"

"I'm just saying," Harry answered. "It seems to be a common theme around here. People seem to go out of their way to make themselves look dumb and make me look really cool. I wonder if it's a spell...?" He trailed off thoughtfully.

Harry took Malfoy's spluttering face and general appearance to be a confirmation of his suspicions. Looking at the aristocratic Slytherin, he was suddenly reminded of another person who had looked just like him. Suddenly, it clicked. Malfoy...wasn't that the name of the Death Eater Harry had brutally murdered at Azkaban? In his mind, Meciell tutted about his horrible memory and Harry grumbled at her. With everything that had happened afterwards, how could he be expected to remember some pathetic, dead-guy's name.

"So," Harry said, adding a touch of sympathy to his voice and promptly startling the already-bewildered Slytherin. "I heard about your father. Tough break there, right?"

Malfoy stilled. Harry watched as his face paled and his eyes became distant and smiled to himself. Clenching his fists, the boy turned an utterly furious and completely ineffective glare upon the Denarian Lord, who casually lounged back against the wall.

"Tough break?" Malfoy uttered quietly. "My father's death was...a tough break?"

"Yeah, tough break," Harry continued on, acting oblivious to the sudden anger the other boy was radiating. "Tough to break into

Azkaban, tough to break his neck..." Harry made a sudden hand motion and let out a loud 'gruk'.

As Malfoy took a step forward, his hand plunging into his robe, Harry continued. "But, have you ever asked yourself 'Who killed Daddy?'"

Malfoy paused in his step.

"I mean, Azkaban isn't exactly an easy place to break into," Harry continued on. "I mean, I'm awesome and everything and I don't think that even I could do it- at least, not without tearing down every single stone in my way. So, what kind of powerful wizard managed to get in and kill your father? Who could do such a thing?"

"It was...It...I..." Malfoy stuttered. The two boys on either side glanced at each other with worried looks. One of them went to place his hand on Malfoy's shoulder but the Slytherin shook it off impatiently. "Do you know who did it, Potter? Is that what you're saying? Tell me!"

His voice had risen into a shout by the end and Harry cast another quick glance around the corner. Seeing that the coast was clear for now, he leaned in towards Malfoy in what he hoped was a conspiratorial manner.

"Well, there are two theories circling the streets," he lied in a soft voice. Malfoy leaned forward eagerly, his eyes hungry for information. "The first is, Voldemort-" Here Malfoy recoiled as if he had been struck, "- just got annoyed at dear old Dad and had him removed."

Malfoy looked distraught at the thought and Harry watched him a tad suspiciously as he wrung his hands together and wiped his sweaty palms on his robes.

"The second is that it was Dumbledore who broke in and got rid of him," Harry continued. "I don't suppose I need to tell you why he would want to. Yep, the old man himself may have waltzed past a battalion of Aurors and a legion of demon-spawn Dementors just to remove somebody he felt was troublesome."

That positively got Malfoy's attention and he began pacing anxiously, even fearfully. Harry watched on, almost delighted that a simple way to psych with the boy was revealing something much deeper. Now, now, now, what was Draco Malfoy up to?

Harry turned away, already feeling bored. "You can go away now," he remarked lazily. "Or I can make you go away. It's your choice."

Malfoy didn't need any more prompting and he practically fled the scene, leaving a somewhat bemused Harry behind. He was trying to put some of the pieces together when a dab of perfume drifted across his nostrils and he paused. Panic surged through him and Harry practically threw himself behind a suit of armour and cloaked himself under a powerful illusion charm. Magic warped in the air around him and he took a deep breath, becoming very still as his target strode straight past him.

He could not allow himself to be seen.

It seemed to be working until she suddenly paused in her step, a faint look of mystification on her face. Harry gulped and was very still as the target glanced around, obviously confused. Slowly, she began walking again, her pace unsteady- as if she knew something was wrong but couldn't prove it. She turned the corner and Harry let out a sigh of relief.

"That was close," he muttered.

Abruptly, he tensed as the target's head shot out from the corner and scanned the hallway again. Her blonde mop disappeared and Harry waited a few more moments just to be sure before he allowed the illusion to crumble into nothingness, a sound similar to scrunching up paper resounding through the hallway.

"She's a crafty bitch, isn't she?"

'I have entirely no sympathy for you,' Meciell told him bluntly and Harry could feel her disdain. 'You brought it on yourself and as they say, 'you reap what you sow'.'

“As they say?” Harry repeated to himself as he approached the Great Hall doors without fear. “As who says? Seriously, name me a single person that I have ever met that has said this.”

‘Me.’

“Somebody objective,” Harry countered back mildly as he opened the doors and ignored the sudden wave of gasps and muttered as he strolled in the Great Hall. “You’re such a sore loser...whoa!”

Harry hastily sidestepped as a couple of giggling Second Years darted from the hall, oblivious to his presence as they threw lumps of mashed potatoes at each other. Harry’s eyes darted to the Professor’s table, but they were all absent save for the large, giant-like one, whose red cheeks, soaked beard and mug was enough to convince Harry that he wasn’t entirely there.

“Little brats,” Harry growled under his breath as he brushed himself off. “They better-“ he paused. “What?” he snapped.

The little girl, a Second or Third Year at best, blushed as Harry scowled down at her. She brushed aside her dark bangs and stared up at him with adoring brown eyes. “Harry Potter!” she breathed. “Do you remember me?”

“Oh, ye- no,” Harry changed midway through.

“We met at Diagon Alley,” the girl pressed. “You told me not to tell anybody my name or they could use dark magic on me.”

“Oh, really?” Harry asked and rubbed his chin. “Something’s coming back to me. What was your name again?”

“Laura Madley!” the girl answered excitably. “Do you really remember?”

“No,” Harry declared flatly and lightly slapped the back of the girl’s head, roughly mussing up her hair, much to her displeasure. “But if I did take the time to give you a lecture about giving out your name, I

expect you to remember and not give it out to the first person who asks.”

He strode past the girl, who was rubbing her hair with an indignant look on her face, and placed himself at the end of the Gryffindor table, where there were empty spaces all around him- just the way he liked it. He only had a few moments before Lunch was over, so he was hoping that he could fill his stomach and leave without anybody being the wiser.

“You need to work on your attitude,” somebody said with a haughty sniff. “It’s a bit abrasive.”

Harry sighed as Hermione and Ron sat down next to him. “Well, you need to work on your face!” he snapped back. “It’s a bit ugly, and by a bit I mean disfigured- and by disfigured I mean that nobody loves you and you’ll die alone.”

Hermione gaped and looked outraged while Ron winced. Harry noticed the metaphorical steam building around her ears and let out a weary sigh.

“Look,” he started. “I’m grateful that you want to make me look good at the expense of acting like a retard in front of everybody but I’m kind of busy. Can’t you just...oh, shit.”

“Hey, Harry!” Amanda greeted cheerfully as she strode through the entrance to the Great Hall, her distinct perfume filling his sensitive nose.

It was a nice smell and oh-so nostalgic, Harry reluctantly admitted as the newest Knight of the Cross plonked herself down right next to him and threw a casual arm around his shoulder. Harry winced while Hermione and Ron looked on, amazement on their faces.

“What’s with the long face, Harry?” Amanda asked with a bright smile and a distinct edge to her voice. “It’s like we haven’t seen each other in a month- oh, wait, we haven’t.”

"Yeah, well, I...it was..." Harry never knew that a situation could feel as uncomfortable as this. He was also struggling to find reasons why he shouldn't pull out his wand and blast his way out of this awkward situation.

The long, slender package on Amanda's back convinced him otherwise. Hell, why was she even carrying that annoying thing around with her anyway?

"What, no comeback?" Amanda teased. She leaned in and confided in a mock whisper, "I'm so embarrassed."

"Where...where did...did you get that robe, huh? In...the...the toilet store?" Harry trailed off and sighed. "Fuck. Amanda, do you really want to do this now?"

"Do what now?" Ron asked shrewdly.

"Do you know that the 'f' word is one of the most offensive words in the English language?" Hermione rebutted sharply at the same time.

"Do you that frogs can't swallow with their eyes open?" Harry retorted. He shrugged at the strange looks he got, thankful for the distraction. "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought we were offering up useless bits of information."

He quickly tore into his meal as Amanda leaned on him, her hair draping over his shoulder as she brought her lips close to his ear. "You will tell me what happened?"

"I'm sorry," Harry whispered back sharply. "I don't share secrets with the enemy."

Amanda drew back and flinched at that and looked hurt, but it was gone in a second as her bright smile replaced it. Harry merely grunted and gave the sword on her back a sharp look. Now that he wasn't a Knight himself, it felt good to hate the wielders of the swords without being hypocritical.

Amanda opened her mouth to speak again and Harry was already dreading the conversation that was bound to take place when something white and fast swished by her face. She blinked, looking startled, while Harry reached out and snatched the paper aeroplane out of the air with nimble hands. He frowned and gazed up at the table, where Dumbledore was eying him intently. With a shrug of his shoulders, he opened the plane up and read the message. It consisted of three words.

Trouble at Ministry.

Next to the words was a crudely drawn symbol, one that Harry instantly recognised as something from within in his field of speciality. Meciél quickly provided his mind with the details and he swore out loud as he stood up from the table and rushed from the Great Hall.

Amanda watched him go and her smile disappeared, a faint look of gloom settling on her features. With a tired sigh, she sat back down and stared off into space as Hermione and Ron pressed her for answers.

Harry expertly fought off the nausea and dizziness as he came out of the Side-Along Apparition. Dumbledore took a wrinkled hand off of his sleeve and gazed around sharply, as if expecting attack at any moment. Harry took the time to survey the surroundings as well. He was standing in a side-street of London or some other large urbanised city. The street contained several shabby-looking office buildings, a pub and a dumpster overflowing with rubbish. It was hardly the ideal place for the location of the Ministry of Magic.

"This place sucks," Harry vocalised helpfully.

Dumbledore nodded once, as if assuring himself, and turned to him with his customary twinkling gaze. "It is hardly the ideal place for an entrance into the very heart of the Ministry of Magic," he murmured, unknowingly echoing Harry's thoughts. "Of course, that is exactly why it's the perfect place for an entrance into the Ministry of Magic."

“Ah,” Harry let out in dawning comprehension and followed the significantly taller Headmaster down the street, making sure to keep an eye out for any wandering eyes. “Gotcha.”

“And, you must also take into consideration that the Ministry of Magic was here first,” Dumbledore continued as he scanned the street. “Now, where is- ah.”

Harry watched with raised eyebrows as Dumbledore approached a smashed-in, faded red telephone box with heavy graffiti scrawled all along the side. He approached the box as Dumbledore opened it up and wrinkled his nose.

“Man,” he groaned. “You are aware that the drunks from the pub over there probably use this as a peeing chamber, right?”

“I highly doubt that,” Dumbledore answered wryly as he fiddled with the broken receiver. “Now, let’s see...”

While Harry was waiting, he took the time to read some of the more interesting pieces of graffiti around the telephone box. “Beat me, bash me, bite my bum...I’ll whip you, strip you, ‘til you...cum? Fuck me, suck me...lick me out, pull my nipples until I...” The writing became faded and illegible.

“Lovely,” Dumbledore replied to his recital, his face barely showing his distaste. “Harry, if you would?”

“You gotta be kidding me,” Harry muttered but obliged and slid into the cramped telephone box, squashing against the grimy glass panes and Dumbledore’s thin, tall body. The Headmaster’s white beard brushed over Harry’s face and he grimaced. “Seriously, if I hear even one “is that a wand in my pocket” joke, I will kill you.”

Dumbledore chuckled as he tapped in several of the numbers on the keypad and did not respond. As the dial whirled back into place, a cool female voice sounded inside the telephone box as if somebody was standing right next to them.

“Welcome to the Ministry of Magic. Please state your name and business.”

“Albus Dumbledore, visiting on an urgent matter that requires my immediate attention,” Dumbledore spoke gravely. “Accompanying me is-“

“Awesome McFunBags,” Harry cut in seriously. “I’m here to be awesome.”

Dumbledore threw Harry a look as the machine spat out two silver name tags. Dumbledore reached down and pinned his to his robes, which read ‘Albus Dumbledore, Emergency Meeting’. Harry picked up his own badge and dismissively threw it over his shoulder.

“Visitor to the Ministry, you are required to submit to a search and present your wand for registration at the security desk, which is located at the far end of the Atrium.”

“Yeah, I won’t be doing that,” Harry remarked as the floor began to shudder. Slowly, the telephone box began to sink into the ground and he sighed. “Bloody wizards...”

Then he could see nothing at all; he could hear only a dull grinding noise as the telephone box made its way down through the earth. Harry tapped his foot impatiently and cleared his throat after a few moments.

“So,” he began awkwardly. “Will the Order be meeting us here?”

“Alas, they will not,” Dumbledore responded and sighed. “It is too dangerous to showcase Order members to the upper echelons of the Ministry of Magic, especially with one such as Rufus Scrimgeour in charge. Besides, I am trying to limit their exposure to...otherworld influences. It is not fair on them.”

“It’s a bit late for that now,” Harry commented.

In the dim light, which was seeping through the bottom of the phone box, Dumbledore’s smile appeared sad. “Not quite,” he murmured. “I

went to the trouble of...how should I put it? Ah, yes. I went to the trouble of muting the memories of that particular incident. They recall nothing of the Winter incident.”

“Oh,” Harry uttered awkwardly. “Okay then.”

A few more moments passed and Harry began squirming on his feet. One highly uncomfortable and extremely awkward situation in a day was bad; two of the said events, well, that was just ridiculous. The cramped space resounded with Dumbledore’s steady breathing and Harry grimaced when the long, almost-ticklish beard quivered against his skin.

“Are you feeling better, Harry?” Dumbledore abruptly asked as the light under their feet grew brighter and brighter.

“Much,” Harry replied honestly.

“Good.” Dumbledore sounded genuinely pleased.

That was all that was said on the matter.

“The threat we are facing here, is it serious?”

“Serious? No,” Harry responded. “Annoying, well...” He hesitated. “I thought I’d forgotten about something.” He muttered.

Dumbledore made a non-committal noise from the back of his throat as the telephone box filled with golden light and came to a complete stop. A loud chime echoed in the box as the door flew open.

“Please be advised that all Ministry of Magic workers are instructed not to leave the Atrium. The Ministry of Magic wishes you a pleasant day,” said the woman’s voice.

Harry stepped out of the box and glanced around. He remembered the Atrium from the last time he had been there, although it had looked a lot worse than it did now. He did not remember it being this hectic. Panicked wizards and witches were fleeing to the rows of fireplaces along the walls, disappearing in large puffs of green flame.

Official-looking wizard dressed in blue or red robes were guiding the Ministry workers away. Several lime-robed men rushed by with a several bloodied and wounded men and women on levitated stretchers.

Harry let out a whistle. "It's not that bad."

"Then you had best be off to deal with it," Dumbledore instructed. "He's on Level Five."

Together, the two of them pushed through the surging crowd and bypassed the security box until they had reached the elevator on the other side of the Atrium. Some of the Hit Wizards and Aurors threw them wary looks, but the presence of Albus Dumbledore seemed to quell their reservations.

"Can you contain it?" Dumbledore asked as Harry stepped forward and summoned the elevator.

"Yeah," Harry answered. "Sammerial is a mindless beast and nothing more. At the very best, he's a nuisance. Give me a couple of minutes and I'll take him out and find the coin. Look, you just get everybody away from him so I can deal with him."

"Very well." Dumbledore acquiesced. "How do you think I should explain this?"

The lift doors chimed and Harry stepped in. He pressed a button and smirked. "Fucked if I know," he snorted as the elevator doors closed with a clang.

The elevator began to move downwards and Harry frowned, sniffing at the air hesitantly. The lower the elevator got, the more pronounced the thick scent of sulphur became. Yes, there was definitely a Denarian down there- and Harry knew exactly which one.

"You could have reminded me," Harry complained as he glanced to his left.

Meciel's illusion smiled at him, as if she had been standing by his side all that time. "Well, I must confess that I too forgot," she murmured quietly. "Well, I did not forget. Rather, that information was not...filed...properly."

"Filed properly?"

"My memory is categorical, not episodic like yours," Meciel explained. "When I am in a host body, I must consciously transfer your memories and convert them into my own. It is a rather complicated process. With all that went on that night, it is understandable that I..."

"Dropped the ball? Missed the kick? Fumbled the pass?" Harry offered teasingly.

Meciel narrowed her eyes good-naturedly. "I suppose you have an idea on how you are going to go out about it," she said.

"Actually, yes," Harry agreed smugly. "I have a full proof plan that..." He trailed off.

"What is it?" Meciel asked curiously and Harry could feel her trying to glean information from his mind.

"Well, actually, all I have is the phrase 'I have a full proof plan'," Harry admitted. The elevator door opened before him and he stepped out. "Beyond that, I'm wide open."

Meciel's illusion did not respond and Harry surveyed the hallway he had just stepped out into. Slumped against the wall right in front of him was the body of a portly wizard, his blank eyes wide open with shock. Harry knelt down by the body and surveyed it critically. Somebody- or something- had shoved something into the man's chest and ripped it apart. To do something like that would require great force.

"Well, at least I know that I haven't been duped," Harry muttered to himself and stood up. He lifted his wand and concentrated. "Echosondra!"

Repeated bursts of sound waves ricocheted off the walls, bouncing up and down the hallways and disappearing in the maze of hallways. They returned to him, bombarding his mind with grainy pictures of lines and curves, only decipherable to Harry. Several of the pictures immediately caught his attention and he immediately turned around and begun to sprint down one of the corridors.

He passed several doors and paused when he came across the bodies of four Hit Wizards, each torn to shreds with residues of chaotic power flickering from their blackened, burned skin. Their features were entirely unrecognisable and the smell that was emanating from them was just foul. The myth that cooked human flesh tasted and smelled like chicken was bullshit.

“That’s some potent Hellfire,” Harry observed as he stood up. “Definitely Sammerial then. He was a mindless bastard but he did have some power behind him.”

He could remember the battle quite well. Verrine and her mindless pet had ambushed him and tried to kill him. The lobster-gorilla beast Sammerial’s old host had been devoured by a powerful creation of Verrine’s earth magic and Harry had been unable to retrieve the coin. No doubt, some unlucky wand-wizard had come across it and had promptly turned insane.

“You....you....!” gurgled a rasping voice from behind him.

Harry turned around and saw a blood-covered, man-eyed wizard limping towards him. His once-pristine robes were covered in muck and gore, some partially burnt off by vicious curses that had been totally ineffective against him. Some patches of his skin were wrinkled, as if the man had been in the bath too long. It was a classic sign of imperfect regeneration, fast and forced healing of critical wounds. The thing that really caught his attention was the glowing red sigil on the man’s forehead. It was pulsing with an erratic, mad light.

Ah. So that’s how Dumbledore had known that sign of Sammerial.

“Sammerial,” Harry greeted casually and offered a wave.

The man wheezed in a breath, his face twisted in rage. "Mistress! Where. Is. Mistress?"

"Verrine is dead, Sammerial," Harry answered and fingered his wand lazily. "So is everybody else. The Blackened Order is gone. I crushed them all."

Sammerial let out a roar of anger and bashed at the walls with his bare hands. The walls shuddered and stone splintered as cracks ripped through it, while Harry merely shook his head, not impressed at all.

"Look into my eyes, Sammerial," Harry demanded. "C'mon, look at me. See if I'm telling the truth." He paused as Sammerial wailed in anger and a vicious smile crossed his face. "You know I'm telling the truth. You can feel it."

Sammerial was silent. Harry could only hear the sound of the possessed wizard's heavy breathing as the bestial Fallen stood there before him. He had to admit, he was impressed that Sammerial had been able to keep his temper in reign. Those who had succumbed to the void were notorious for their lack of reason.

"Psst. This is where you try to kill me," Harry interjected quietly.

Sammerial cocked his head, the sigil on his forehead burning brightly. Then, to Harry's amazement, he lumbered down to his knees and bowed his head.

"Serve?"

Harry cocked his head and considered the only other living Denarian with a frown. Did he really want a Denarian servant? He could feel Meciel's ambivalence about the notion and sighed. Kneeling down, he placed a hand on Sammerial's shoulder and concentrated. Where was...there! He could feel the coin nestled in the host body.

Without so much as a second thought, Harry extended his wings of bone and slammed them into Sammerial's prostrating form.

Sammerial roared in fury and the sigil burned with Hellfire was Harry slashed into the man's spine. The sigil faded away and the man's roar became a gurgle of pain as Harry dislodged the coin from its position and dug it from the man's body.

"Sorry, Sammerial," Harry said apologetically. "I can't let you live after this ruckus. Sorry to you too, wizard," Harry added to the dying wizards. "I couldn't let you live either."

Harry waited until the wizard had passed on, the light leaving his eyes, before picked up the silver coin and placed it in his pocket. He stood up and wiped his hands on his robes, before a scraping noise caught his attention. He spun around, his wings flaring up over his head, only to see several crimson-robed Aurors approaching him, their wands out and levelled at him.

"You there! Halt!" One of them barked.

Harry groaned. "Oh, really?" he asked incredulously. "Is this how it's going to be?"

The Aurors fanned out around him as the lead Auror, a dark-skinned man that looked tantalisingly familiar, approached him. "Harry Potter. You will stand down and comply or we will subdue you by force."

Harry narrowed his eyes at the threat. On the one hand, he didn't want to get into a fight unless he really had to. On the other hand, his pride was screaming at him to smack this weakling aside for even daring to presume that he could stand up to a Denarian Lord. He was saved from having to make a decision when a silvery burst of light shot down the hallway and struck the Auror harmlessly.

"Stand down!" the dark-skinned Auror spoke after a moment. He lowered his wand and the other Aurors followed suit, while Harry watched on with a cocked eyebrow. "Harry Potter. I have orders from my superiors to...allow you to go as you please. Move along."

"Just like that?" Harry asked in surprise.

The Auror's face could have been made from stone and Harry grinned. Dumbledore had actually pulled through for him. He was beginning to owe that man a few favours. He collapsed his wings into his back and pocketed his wand, strolling away with a wide grin. The chapter of his life that concerned the Order of the Blackened Denarius was officially over now.

Now, about that lunch...

"I want to know what happened! I want to know why my elite Aurors could not handle a possessed-wizard! I want to know why a schoolboy had to go and fight my battles!"

Rufus Scrimgeour stopped his shouting and gingerly rubbed his throat. The Head of the Aurors bowed his head and quickly left the room as the Minister of Magic limped back to his desk and collapsed on his seat. Initially, he had thought that the hardest part of being a Minister of Magic would be the bloody paperwork. He had been wrong. The hardest part of being a Minister of Magic was keeping those mindless sheep of a public happy. He had felt disgusted at Fudge when the ex-Minister had used the media as a shameless propaganda tool, disgusted that the Minister of Magic was censoring and controlling a 'private' media corporation.

These days, he thought that Fudge just might have been on to something.

What was the public's reaction going to be if they found out that he couldn't even defend his own Ministry?

He slammed his palm onto his desk and vented his frustrations in the form of a rough, angry growl. A confident knock at his door made him look up and he scowled.

"What is it?" he barked. "I explicitly said that I did not want to be disturbed."

"Sorry to disturb you, Sir," the Auror greeted smoothly. "But we've found some information about the possession that you need to know. It's related to Harry Potter."

This caught Srimgeour's attention and he straightened up.

"Continue, Auror Gibbons," he commanded. "Tell me how Potter managed to do what my own Aurors couldn't."

"Potter managed to do what we couldn't because Potter is one of them," Auror Gibbons replied. "Tell me, sir, have you ever heard of the Order of the Blackened Denarius...?"

Rufus shook his head and the Death Eater infiltrator smiled at the look of rapt attention on the Minister of Magic's face. This wouldn't even be hard.

A/N: Well, this has been on DLP for ages but I'd forgotten that I hadn't posted it. The good news is that I'm done with uni, I only have 1 exam left and stuffed if I'm going to study for it. The bad news is that I just bought Borderlands and I'm into Heroes of Newerth atm. Still, I'll start writing and hopefully I can get everything done by Christmas. Enjoy.

“-and he was completely rude!” Hermione huffed. The bristly-haired girl folded her arms over her chest and gave Amanda a sideways look. “As always.”

Amanda lifted her head to roll her eyes at Hermione as Ron carefully, and with the look of somebody very well aware of his actions, wrapped his arm around Hermione's shoulders. The girl tensed, glaring at Ron with annoyance, but relented when he smiled back at her reassuringly and sighed. Amanda looked at the display of romance and wondered when scenes like that made her want to gag.

Or perhaps it was just who it was from. There was no way that Amanda wanted to picture the two of them doing anything other than holding hands- and even that was a bit of a stretch. It's wasn't that Amanda didn't like Ron, actually, she thought he was a genuinely funny and decent person. It was just that he wasn't very attractive- at least, not to her. Not when she compared him to somebody like Harry...

Harry.

Amanda let out a loud moan and dropped her head back on the table with a loud thump. Hermione and Ron exchanged quick looks as Ron shook his head good naturedly and nudged the despairing blonde. The newest Knight of the Cross batted away his head and made an indistinguishable noise from the back of her throat. Hermione sighed as Ron gave up and turned back to her, frowning.

“Potter is a bastard,” he commented. “What did you expect?”

Hermione sniffed in disdain.

“Besides,” he continued. “For somebody you hate, you sure spend a lot of time talking about him when he’s not here. Should I be jealous?”

“Wha- this is- jealous?” Hermione spluttered, her cheeks flushing with colour. “I am not!” She turned to Amanda for support only to find the girl glaring at her with narrowed eyes, desperately trying to hide the smile tugging at her lips.

“You better stay away from my man!” Amanda threatened and her lips twitched as Hermione made a strangled noise. She couldn’t help herself and she laughed. “Oh, the look on your face...!”

Hermione folded her arms across her chest in a huff. “Does Potter even know that he’s ‘your man’ or haven’t you told him yet? No offence, Amanda, but he doesn’t seem like that type for that.”

Amanda winced and her mood abruptly switched. She sighed glumly and put her chin on her hands. “Tell me about it,” she muttered grumpily.

She had found plenty of reasons to justify herself being outraged at the way Harry had treated her. He had taken off, leaving her at the mercy of her Mother – she shuddered at that particular unpleasant memory. Then he had had the audacity to disappear for a month, right after what they had shared with each other. Now, he had popped into Hogwarts yesterday and Amanda had felt like such a fool when he had practically stood up and ran away from her.

Maybe she shouldn’t have been so assertive?”

No. Amanda shook her head firmly. No. It wasn’t her fault. It was Harry’s. Harry Potter was a right old bastard who didn’t understand the word ‘commitment’ if it had spun around and bitten him in the arse.

She sighed.

Despite her best efforts, Amanda could only delude herself for so long. There was this nagging voice in the back of her head that sounded remarkably like Harry which kept saying ‘I told you so’ in a

very smug tone. She looked back up at Hermione and Ron, who were bickering over something yet again, and watched them enviously. The argued like two First Year Slytherins shoved into a cauldron (Amanda had Fred and George to thank for that particular analogy) but it was obvious that there was some sort of mutual attraction there. She could see it in the way Ron would nervously dart his eyes away at times and the way Hermione would reach up and toy with that particular lock of hair whenever Ron grinned at her.

Why couldn't she have something like that?

Amanda groaned out loud again, much to the bemusement of Hermione and Ron. Ron sniggered and prodded Amanda in the arm as the blonde buried her head in her arms yet again.

"You're really changing your tune about Potter," Ron said conversationally. "Normally you're kissing his arse-"

"Ron!"

"Sorry," he apologised insincerely. "Normally you're kissing his bottom so much that you can never say anything bad about him. He's really gotten to you know, hasn't he?"

Hermione scowled at Ron and looked like she was about to berate him when Amanda sighed.

"He's right," she said unhappily. "What's I really that lame?"

Hermione and Ron exchanged a look.

"Yes," they replied in unison. Hermione at least had the decency to look abashed when Amanda groaned, idly reflecting that it was becoming a habit of hers.

"You know," Hermione started carefully. "Potter's treated you like garbage before but you've never reacted like this. What's changed?"

Amanda flushed. "Um..." She found that her tongue was tied as she floundered about for an excuse under Hermione's scrutinising gaze. "It's just..."

"Something happened!" Ron, of all people, seemed to have figured it out first.

Hermione glanced at him crossly. "Please," she said derisively. "Amanda's may have a bit of a crush on Potter but she wouldn't...." she trailed off as Amanda sunk into her seat, looking sheepish. "Oh, please tell me that you didn't..."

"It's just that..." Amanda began and faltered. "Well, he...I...gah!"

"You did not let that boy kiss you, did you?" Hermione demanded and Amanda blinked.

"I can't believe you let him snog you!" Ron grumbled. "Why do the snarky bastards always get the girls before I do?"

Hermione stilled and Ron paused.

"Wait, I meant in general!" he protested quickly and flushed, the tips of his ears reddening. "No offence, Amanda, but you're not the one for me."

Hermione expression rapidly changed from annoyed to adoring as she clasped her hands together. Ron smiled hesitantly up at her.

"Er...yeah, right. We kissed," Amanda muttered, feeling awkward at the question and at the scene she was watching. She suddenly decided that perhaps it was not a good idea to tell her best friend that a little more than kissing had gone on. "And now he won't talk to me!"

Hermione opened her mouth to respond when a loud owl screech cut her off. Amanda glanced up, the remarkable sight of a swarm of well-trained owls swooping down delivering letters barely fazing her anymore. She pushed around her breakfast as Hermione paid her mail owl and unrolled the Daily Prophet.

It was a lot more complicated than she had first realised. The Sword of the Cross may have been stuffed under her bed, hidden from prying eyes, but she had seen enough of Harry and her father to realise that that holy relic was going to dominate her life from now on. Maybe that was the reason why Harry was avoiding her? In the end, she was a Knight of the Cross and he was a Denarian Lord. They were practically fated to fight each other. They probably would one day.

Maybe it was for the best, Amanda decided. Maybe it was good that Harry had broken away from her. In the future, if she had managed to maintain some kind of relationship with her then there would be a conflict of loyalties if she was 'tasked' with stopping him. If Harry had reciprocated her feelings, then could she honestly stand face to face with him and raise her sword against him if need be?

No.

Could he?

Amanda knew deep in her heart that, yes, Harry could be that ruthless if he needed to be. He wouldn't have survived so long if Harry hadn't been willing to do what it took to achieve his goals, not with the enemies he had. If Amanda was tasked by God to find and stop Harry, then she had no doubt that Harry would take one look at her sword and then do his best to kill her.

She could not picture an outcome where he would not succeed.

Hermione scoffed and threw her paper down on the table, breaking Amanda out of her daze. She frowned at Hermione's look of disgust, suddenly aware of the rippling wave of mutters that were spreading through the hall. She looked up and saw that many of the students had their heads crouched over the paper, looks of disbelief or shock on their faces.

"What is it?" Amanda asked Hermione, who opened her mouth to respond.

Suddenly, there was a thud from the Head Table as Professor Dumbledore practically leapt from his seat and sprinted from the Great Hall, his robes billowing and flapping out around him. The other Professors at the head table looked surprised or disbelieving and suddenly Amanda had a very bad feeling about what was going on.

“Has Voldemort attacked again?” Amanda asked Hermione quickly, ignoring Ron’s wince with well-practiced ease.

“No,” Hermione denied with a tone of disgust. She gestured at the paper. “What a load of tosh. Honestly, who’s going to believe this garbage? Potter’s rude and bad-mannered but he’s not this ‘Denarian’ demon they’re spouting on about.”

Amanda stilled and shock flooded through her, her limbs suddenly tingling. “What?!” she shrieked and snatched the paper from Hermione’s hands, ignoring the looks she was getting.

She scanned the title quickly- “Harry Potter- The Demon-Who-Lived?” and quickly rushed through the article, noting words such as demon, Denarian, Fallen Angel, Dark Magic, Murder and a lot of speculation. Hermione was saying something else but she couldn’t reply as the one thought resounded in her mind.

Harry was in deep shit.

Albus remained quiet, his hands clasped and his head bowed in deep thought, even as the Order of Phoenix hollered and argued around him. In a way, Albus was disappointed in many of the members in how they were reacting to the Daily Prophet article. It was common knowledge even to his students that the Daily Prophet was the Ministry of Magic’s way of disseminating propaganda and its agenda, regardless of the truth. Many of the slightly-hysterical members were falling into the same trap that the Ministry of Magic wanted them too.

Unfortunately, on a deeper level, Albus couldn’t blame them for their reactions. Unlike the rest of the Order, he knew that the article had contained mostly fact when it pronounced Harry Potter as a member of a Satan-worshipping Order who was possessed by a demon- even

if the Daily Prophet had tried to explain the demon as some sort of dark possession ritual.

“Kingsley,” he murmured and the babble around him quietened, many expectant faces turning towards him eagerly. Albus lifted his twinkles blue eyes off the table and stared at the Senior Auror, who shifted on his feet, as if he was still the Fifth Year that Albus had caught peeking in the Quidditch Changing rooms. “What does the Ministry want?”

“Orders from high up say that there’s a lot of interest in bringing Potter in for ‘questioning’,” Kingsley answered in his deep baritone. He paused for a moment. “I also got the impression that Rufus-“

“On a first name basis with him, are you?” Moody growled but Kingsley barely spared him a glance.

“- was not very happy that the Daily Prophet had ran with this article. It seemed to me that the editors had gone behind his back to print something. That said, I’m sure that he was aware of the rumour before the Daily Prophet had gotten a hold of it.”

“Why’s that?” Tonks asked curiously.

Kingsley shrugged. “Just a feeling,” he answered calmly.

“Excellent,” Severus drawled from the other side of the table. “We can be rest assured that Kingsley Shackelbolt is on the case with his fine detective work and his ‘gut feelings’.”

Kingsley replied with two very derogatory words, his sudden calm demeanour replaced with a fierce scowl, and Albus sighed. As Severus sneered, but looked entirely too happy to keep retorting to the unhappy Auror, Albus was once again reminded that while he knew why Severus acted as he did, there was no disputing that fact that at times the man could be such an incredible pain in the arse.

Albus paused. Oh dear. Perhaps Harry was rubbing off on him just as much as he was rubbing off on the young Denarian.

"I have something to say," Arthur Weasley spoke up, his voice rising above that of Kingsley and Snape. Albus glanced at him and noted that he was fidgeting quite uncomfortably. "Why...well, why not? Why can't the Ministry question him? It's a load of tosh, sure, so as long as the boy has legal representation then we can deny these rumours and prevent anything else from getting out."

"No!" Albus disagreed immediately. His vehemence must have shocked the Order because they all looked startled and Albus immediately calmed himself down. "Harry Potter possesses vital information about the Order and about the war effort that cannot fall into the Ministry of Magic's hands. Not only are some of the activities that he has been involved in are, in the strictest sense, illegal, but the Ministry of Magic is a cesspool for witches and wizards sympathetic and downright loyal to Lord Voldemort's cause."

Moody grunted. "Whatever the Ministry learns, Voldemort learns an hour later."

"So, what do we do?" Tonks questioned and Albus felt many eyes directed at him.

"We do nothing," he commanded quietly and sat up in his chair, delivering a piercing gaze to each member of the Order of Phoenix. "Harry must avoid the Ministry of Magic at all costs. I have no doubt that Scrimgeour will try to take in Harry and I have no doubt that Harry will whole-heartedly resist. It will be safer if Harry were to remain away from the Ministry for the time being."

Albus sat back and was almost satisfied with the responses he received. Many of his comrades were nodding their heads and agreeing with him. However, he could see that some of the more shrewd wizards and witches were thinking furiously. After a few moments, it was Moody who broke the silence with his usual bluntness.

"I'm going to ask what we've all been thinking," Moody said hoarsely, his electric-blue eye spinning wildly in his eyes-socket. He slammed a hand on the table and leaned forward, peering across at Albus, who took in the penetrating look steadily and with little reaction. "Is there

any truth to this, Albus? You can't tell me that there 'aint something fishy going on with Potter. There are missions that I can't remember; there are friends that we've suddenly lost... Mundungus, Diggle, Purdmore..."

Albus barely held in the wince at the sound of those names. It had upset him to remove their final moments from the members of the Order of Phoenix that had come with him to rescue Harry from the Winter Lady Maeve, but he had done it anyway. As much as Albus had believed that their sacrifice had not been in vain, there were other pressing issues that overrode his morals- and the 'other' magical world that the Wizarding World remained wholly separate from was one of them.

They had not been allowed to remember.

"I know you, Albus," Moody continued fiercely. "I know when you're hiding the truth. Look me in the eye and tell me the truth! Do it, Albus! Tell us all the truth."

"The truth," murmured Albus, his eyes unfocussed. He let out a heavy sigh. "My friend, the truth is that Harry Potter is vital to the eventual defeat of Lord Voldemort. The truth is that his burgeoning powers are quickly proving to be a match for my own. The truth is that, in the end, I believe that it will come down to a battle between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort- and only one will walk away."

He cast a glance around the table. "It has been prophesized!"

Moody sat back down, looking disgruntled.

"We need to look past the propaganda put out by the Ministry. We need to look past the propaganda put out by Lord Voldemort!" Albus held out his arms, as if he was beseeching them all. "I need you to put your trust into me. I trust Harry Potter. Trust me to make the right decisions."

He cast a stern gaze over the Order, many who were looking abashed.

"Now, onto other matters of concern," Albus said dismissively, suddenly sounding and looking much more cheerful. His eyes twinkled and the entire atmosphere of the room changed as he cast a gaze at the colourfully-haired woman at the other end of the table. "Nymphadora-

"Don't call me that," the woman muttered but the Headmaster continued on as if he hadn't heard her.

"How did your assignment go?"

"The assignment?" Tonks asked blankly. She gave Albus a strange look. "I gave it to Potter."

There was a pause at the table.

"What?" Albus demanded and straightened up in his chair. "Why would you do that, Nymphadora?"

He already knew the most likely answer. Harry had probably just wanted to dive right back into the fray after a month of idleness and had snatched a mission of one of the few Order members that he knew on speaking terms.

"Because he said that...you...had...told..." Tonks trailed off and her hair turned lime green. "Oh, I screwed up, didn't?"

"You fool!" Moody snapped. He glared at the crestfallen woman. "Constant Vigilance is essential to our survival and you just let anybody wearing Harry Potter's face give you orders?"

Tonks stammered out a weak reply while Albus took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He had been counting on Harry been relatively isolated from the Wizarding World at the moment, which would have given the Headmaster some time to formulate a plan to deal with the Daily Prophet issue.

"Oh dear, He murmured to himself. "I do hope that Harry doesn't overreact when he hears the news."

“What the fuck did you just say?”

Harry knew he had a bloodthirsty and vicious grin on his face as he grabbed a hulking wizard, who had to be twice as burly as he was, and threw him to the side with very little effort. He grinned meanly as he strode forward, bending down and grabbing a fist full of the wizard's hair.

“Like I said, it was my drink!” Harry whispered menacingly.

He let out a whooping laugh as he slammed the man's head into the ground. There was a sickening crack that Harry promptly ignored as he stood up and turned to the rest of the bar with a disgruntled scowl.

“What the hell are you looking at?” he snapped.

Many of the patrons suddenly decided that the floor was something of considerable interest and ducked their heads. Harry spat to one side, making sure that he didn't actually leave any saliva traces on the ground, and stumbled into his seat, acting much drunker than he really was, which was not at all. Really, he had known that the mission he had managed to filch off of Tonks was going to be boring-retrieving an intelligence package was just a fancy way of saying 'picking up a couple of scrolls'. Still, his contact, whoever the hell that was meant to be (somebody wearing a stuffed duck for a hat, of all things) hadn't shown up at all and it had officially left Harry in a bad mood.

That was probably why he had picked that fight. Officially, acting like a complete asshole did nothing but help him blend in with the undesirables around this part of the Wizarding World. Unofficially though, he just liked belting people up. In retrospect, he supposed that that made him a bit of a tosser.

Harry sighed into his drink and lazily glanced to the other seat in his small corner booth of the pub. Meciél blinked and raised her head from the glossy magazine in front of her, an inquisitive expression on her illusionary face.

“I'm bored,” Harry told her bluntly.

"Tough," Meciél replied uncaringly. She turned away and began surveying the magazine with extreme interest as Harry gasped unconvincingly.

"Mean!" He exclaimed. "It was uncalled for, too!"

"You called me a bitch," Meciél rebutted and frowned at him. She looked very prim and proper in her silver and white sparkling robes. "For the record, beloved, most women find that insulting."

"I did not call you a bitch," Harry disagreed. "I said that you were acting bitchy. There's a very clear distinction between the two."

"Explain it to me then," Meciél asked calmly as she reached out and- at least, to Harry's senses- closed the magazine.

"Well, when I- er... if I call you a bitch, it implies that you're permanently bitchy," Harry tried to explain awkwardly. "When I say that you're acting bitchy, I'm just saying that you're being a bitch in that particular moment." He nodded to himself, clearly satisfied. "Yep. That's how it is."

"Harry?"

"Yeah?"

"You're an idiot," Meciél deadpanned but she was smiling beautifully.

Harry had once suspected that she had put on airs for some of the interaction between them, since it couldn't be that hard for a being living inside his mind to figure out what he was going to do next. The more he had gotten to understand Meciél, the more he had come to realise that Meciél liked not knowing what was going on his head every single moment. She liked his unpredictability.

Harry liked how she couldn't see him mentally undressing her with his eyes.

"I can," Meciél replied offhandedly and smiled at him wickedly. "And, beloved, you have got it oh so wrong in all the best ways."

"Tease," Harry grumbled, his cheeks suddenly feeling a tad hot.

Meciél leaned forward and Harry might have been imagining things (or Meciél had done a quick switcheroo on him) but she was showing considerably more cleavage than he thought she had before.

"If you really want to see me naked and do other delectable things to my nubile, tight and utterly feminine body, then you know what you need to do," she whispered huskily. The sound of her voice sent shivers up his spine and he could 'feel' her warm breath blowing across his face.

"I'm not going to beg you," Harry said flatly. He smiled at her charmingly. "Besides, we both know that it's you who wants me. If you're really nice to me, I might take off my shirt for you." He gave her a wicked grin.

"Dream on, boy," Meciél purred.

"Oh, I do," Harry replied quickly and gave her a lecherous once-over. "Believe me, I do."

Meciél pouted- pouted- at him and Harry just had to grimace. "Really?" he asked light-heartedly. "The very powerful and incredibly ancient entity doesn't get its own way and it pouts like a little girl? Why don't you go and have a cry if you feel so bad?"

Meciél cocked her head and suddenly she disappeared. Harry frowned, the smile slipping away from his lips as he glanced around. Maybe that last comment had pissed her off just a tad too much. He mentally sighed and took a swill from the strong, nasty and completely ineffectual alcohol. Suddenly, a weight dropped on his lap and loud piercing cry filled the air. Harry spluttered his drink all over the table in surprise and shot a glance down. On his lap, clutching to the filthy, dirty robes of the illusion he had layered over himself, was a

small, pink lump of flesh. It took Harry a couple of seconds to realise it was a baby.

“Really?” He scoffed in disgust.

The baby glanced up at him and Harry noticed its eyes glimmered with silver light. Amusement trickled into his mind, originating from the hot spot in the back of his head he associated with Meciél. With nothing short of a mischievous grin, the baby opened its mouth and Hell visited Harry upon Earth in the manner of loud, shrieking cries for attention. Harry groaned and slammed his hand on the table. He tried to brush the baby off but he knew it was futile- the whole thing was just an illusion orchestrated by a bitchy fallen angel.

The baby’s cries suddenly rose a couple dozen decibels and Harry winced, clutching his ears and glaring at the illusion on his lap/

“A very immature bitchy fallen angel!” he shouted over the din.

The baby continued to cry and Harry realised that he had just shouted in the middle of a relatively quiet bar to a noise that nobody else could hear. He glanced around and noticed that everybody was sending him strange glances, some casually holding their wands in the event that he went bat-shit insane on them.

“Er...I was humming a song?” Harry called over the baby’s cries and sighed when the nearest customer, a thin, small little wizard with yellow teeth, cringed. “Fuck, that’s annoying.”

The man opened his mouth and said something that was lost over the noise of Meciél’s illusion. Harry had been watching the man’s lips and while he couldn’t lip read himself, Meciél could, and the Fallen angel immediately cancelled her illusions. Seconds after the man had talked, his voice filled Harry’s ears as if he had just repeated the words to him again.

“You’re acting as crazy as that Potter, shouting about those Fallen Angels and Blackened Order and Denarius and all of that,” the man had scoffed at him.

The words sent an unpleasant chill down Harry's spine.

"What are you talking about?" Harry spat out rudely.

The man grunted and chucked a newspaper at Harry, who caught it deftly and quickly unravelled it. He didn't need to read it in order to spot that it was about him, the very unflattering picture of him scowling and glaring on the front page was bad enough. In the time that it had taken Harry to process the picture, Meciél had already read the article word for word.

"Harry." She sounded distressed. "They know!"

Harry immediately stood up and made his way to the exit, his mind whirring. Only Dumbledore and...and Voldemort had known what he was. He opened the door and walked out into the brisk morning, barely aware of where he was going. He shook his head in anger and felt his rage bubbling below the surface. That fucking wanker had screwed him over yet again!

Harry suddenly paused and shifted direction, his feet taking himself down an alleyway and into somewhere more secluded.

He wasn't quite sure how much contact the Wizarding World had with knowledge of the 'Otherworld'- the magical world that Harry really belonged to. He didn't know how well, if at all, the Ministry could access other records to ascertain his status. The White Council couldn't come after him, he was a citizen of the Wizarding World now.

The Ministry of Magic, on the other, could do whatever they wanted to him- granted that they caught him first.

"Harry Potter."

Harry glanced up, well aware that seven witches or wizards had surrounded him on all sides. The street was very quiet, it was why Harry had come down this way. He glanced at the Auror who had spoken, a tall man with red hair that looked vaguely familiar, and scowled.

"I aint no Potter kid," he growled in an extremely terrible foreign accent. All it did was make his voice sound guttural and rough, which, he supposed, was probably a good thing. "G'way, I aint done nothin' that needs no Aurors!"

"We know it's you, Potter," the lead Auror said firmly, his crimson robes flapping in the breeze. The golden Ministry crest glinted in the sun. "We have a record of your Apparition signature from your repeated entries to the Ministry of Magic. We were able to lock in on you quite easily."

Harry inwardly cursed. It had been a while since he had donned the full suite of concealment and obscuration charms that had hidden him from view. He had apparated close to the bar earlier in the morning and it wouldn't have taken them long to get a catch on him from there. To be fair, it wasn't like he knew that the Ministry of Magic had a decent sample of his apparition signature and, c'mon, it wasn't like he was some kind of paranoid bastard who thought that everybody was out to get him.

Just most people.

Including the Ministry of Magic, it seemed.

Harry let the illusion slide away and glared at the Auror, his green eyes burning with intensity. His foot was tapping on the ground impatiently. "What?" he spat out. "I'm in a really bad mood right now, so this better be good."

"I'm afraid that I have a warrant giving me the power to take one Harry James Potter into custody for questioning," the lead Auror said even as his six partners circled Harry warily, their wands out and ready.

"Well, there's somebody with that name in Kent, I think," Harry mentioned offhandedly. "Go question him. I'm sure he'll be able to explain lots of things for you- for example, why you touch little children."

The Auror exchanged a glance with one of the others, a woman with pale yellow hair. "Let the record show that Harry James Potter has refused to cooperate, giving us the right to subdue him with Class-4 restraining spells."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" Harry interjected quickly as the Aurors levelled their wands at him in anticipation. "Wait! Let me...let me say something!"

The Auror was shaking his head. "No, sir, you need to come with me."

"Wait!" Harry protested quickly. "I just have one question, just one, and then I'll shut up and be a good little momma's boy!"

"What?" the red-haired Auror asked sharply.

Harry suddenly let out a mean grin. "Why do you think I've been tapping my foot?" he asked and the Auror unwillingly glanced down at Harry's constantly tapping foot. Harry smirked and with a sudden 'whoosh', his wand was in his hand. The Aurors around him tensed and began to move as Harry calmly brought down a single finger and placed it on the tip of his wand.

"Boom."

The cobbled pavement around them was suddenly thrown up in waves of dirt and smoke as a deafening roar filled the street. The Aurors were thrown back as mud exploded from new geysers, which bubbled up waves upon waves of thick, sluggish mud and propelled the law enforcement officials back. They disappeared under the muck and Harry grinned at his handiwork. One of the Aurors stirred and Harry grinned as he strolled over and kicked the poor man in the ribs.

"See?" he said to nobody in particular. "Just like I was raised by my 'momma'- resisting arrest. One of the strong, family values of the day, right alongside with murder and burning things." He paused and sighed wistfully. "Oh, I really do like burning things."

His good mood disappeared quite quickly though and he frowned. If the Ministry of Magic was going to become his enemy then things were going to get quite complicated. He had to speak to Dumbledore.

A/N: Hey guys. I've penned out the rest of Denarian Lord and, basically, this story will be over at the end of Chapter 36. I have the next two chapters after this already written, they're just undergoing some beta work and will be up shortly. The chapters after that I expect to start on quite soon. I'm hoping that everything gets cleared up, although I've left a few things 'mysterious' solely for the purpose of being mysterious. Again, as always, a massive thanks to the people at DLP for their help as awesome betas.

"Oh, he is dead. He is so, so dead. I'm going to kill him. I'm going to raise him from the dead, chop off his dick, make him eat it and kill the son of a bitch again!"

Harry finished his rant but continued pacing around Dumbledore's office furiously. To his credit, Albus Dumbledore did not appear phased and barely looked up from the great tome in his lap, similar to the ones lining the bookshelves in the room. Harry scowled, indignant at this apparent show of indifference and slammed his hands on the Headmaster's desk, glowering at the apparent unconcern the man was showing.

Dumbledore looked up and blinked, as if finally noticing that Harry was there. "Did you want something?" he asked politely. "You have to forgive me for not paying attention earlier. You see, I was trying to do something constructive by going through the Wizenamgot Charter and Ministry policies to see if you were truly in danger from your secret being known to the Ministry of Magic."

Harry drew back, feeling abashed but Dumbledore wasn't done.

"Why, with the soothing noise of your temper tantrum, I must have dozed off. Forgive me, Harry, for not doing something constructive. I feel very..."

"Alright, alright," Harry cut in, his fading anger resurging with a fresh bout of annoyance. "I get it, I get it. What's the verdict?"

Dumbledore sighed and lifted the book up off of his lap and placing it on the table. "It is difficult," he confessed. "The Wizarding World is largely secular. There are a few old scattered religions to this and that magical deity, but for the majority of the people God and demons and angels do not play an important role in their beliefs."

"That's a good thing, right?" Harry asked carefully. He plopped himself in a seat opposite Dumbledore and awaited a reply.

"Maybe," Dumbledore answered quietly and stroked his beard in thought. "The main issues in any possible Ministry prosecution would be your status as a 'human being' and the 'dark' connections your link with Meciél would have. Truly, the Denarian host are a step above your average wizard and witch. If the Ministry decides that you are to be classed as a 'magical creature' than a wizard, well, then you would be in some serious trouble. Unfortunately, our world is not known for its kindness and tolerance to those who are different."

Harry sighed and flopped himself in one of the chairs. It was quite unusual for him, he reflected, to feel worried. He was only now becoming aware of how much he depended on the Wizarding World for his needs. The 'other' magical world was hostile towards him whereas the Wizarding World, for the most part (and those who hadn't actually met him) loved or idolised him. The muggle world might have kept his interest but that would put him on the radar of both the White Council and the Ministry of Magic.

Oh, how he hated Voldemort so very, very much.

"I suppose the best path would be for you to avoid the Ministry of Magic until, hopefully, this can fade away from the public memory," Dumbledore advised and Harry suddenly shifted on his feet, feeling sheepish. "You will find that the Wizarding World is fickle at the very best of times and something else will attract their attention soon enough, so long as you do not do anything to aggravate the situation..."

Dumbledore trailed off, gazing at Harry speculatively, and he let out a little mild sigh. "Oh dear," he murmured. "What did you do, Harry?"

“Officially, I was the victim of unwanted harassment and abuse from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, who denied me my rights and attacked me without provocation,” Harry answered evasively, but relented when Dumbledore pierced him with a single, mean look. “Unofficially, I may have bitch-slapped a squad of Aurors around, who, by the way, were really, really terrible. Either I’m getting even more awesome than I already am or standards have gone way down.”

“In times of need, the Department of Magical Law Enforcement cannot afford to be picky,” Dumbledore replied absently, looking very weary. “Harry, my boy, I wish you hadn’t done that.”

“What?” Harry snapped defensively. “They’re fine. Broken bones, cracked skulls and minor organ damage- that’s all.”

“Rufus Scrimgeour is not like Minister Fudge. He is a proud man and a slight against any faculty of the Ministry is a slight against himself. By engaging those Aurors, you have made this matter a personal issue for him,” Dumbledore explained. He gazed out of the window, observing the afternoon sky in deep thought.

“Maybe I should go away again,” Harry suggested. He suddenly perked up. “Ooh. I can go on holidays again. That’ll be fun.”

“No!” Dumbledore rejected sharply and Harry had to blink at the old man’s sudden forcefulness. “That is what Lord Voldemort wants.”

“Huh?”

“This is merely Voldemort’s pre-emptive strike,” Dumbledore said gravely. “He wants to force you underground, to keep you into hiding and out of sight. I do not know what he intends to do but I can tell you that he does not want you to be there.”

“Then, what should we do?” Harry asked with a scowl. “I can’t really help the Order much with anything if everybody and their mother is looking for me.”

"I agree," Dumbledore replied calmly. "Instead of delaying Voldemort's supplies and ferreting out his supporters, you should focus on your true mission."

"Oh?" Harry perked up considerably, a smile crossing his face. He knew he was in one of those foul moods that he couldn't quite get rid of unless he had had a chance to blow some shit up. "You've found something then?"

Dumbledore nodded. "As you are aware, there are three more Horcruxes that we have to locate. I believe one is in the form of a golden locket, and I will tell you more very shortly. The second, I have ascertained, has been bound to Lord Voldemort's companion snake, which remains by his side at all times. The third, however, has eluded me. Until recently, I was bewildered by where- or what- it was."

"You know where it is now?" Harry asked curiously.

For the first time in the conversation, Dumbledore hesitated. This only made Harry more curious and he scratched his head in thought. Eventually, Dumbledore raised his arm and leaned over the desk to poke Harry in the head. Harry scowled and rubbed his forehead, scowling at the old man.

"What was that for?" he demanded. He paused as it finally clicked and let out a soft 'ah'. "Oh...well..." Harry trailed off, suddenly feeling cautious. The Horcrux could be in him? "Are you sure?"

"It makes sense and it would explain something about the night your parents died and you received that scar- as faint as it is now," Dumbledore answered solemnly. "I only have my suspicions, of course. I think it would be better if we asked somebody who is a little closer to the subject matter."

An illusion of Meciél appeared into the seat next to Harry, who glanced over with an inquisitive look and a deep feeling of apprehension in his gut. Somehow, he suspected having a Horcrux within him might be a tad difficult to remove and, well, fuck, the entire concept was just creepy. There was a little piece of Voldemort in him?

There weren't many more blatant homosexual metaphors than that.

"Allow me to speak to him," Meciél asked Harry.

Harry nodded and lifted his wand, swishing and flicking the modified piece of holly in a particularly elaborate illusionary spell. Magic twisted through the air, distorting and bending light around one of the empty seats until another carbon-copy of the fallen angel (minus the glow and mist that Meciél liked to put on for him every now and then) sat next to him. Harry nodded at the 'real Meciél' who shimmered away. Harry allowed a slither of Hellfire to surge through his wand and suddenly 'Meciél' took a life of her own.

"A self-autonomous illusion," Dumbledore murmured appreciatively. "Very difficult magic, very difficult indeed. Well done, Harry."

"Albus Dumbledore," Meciél spoke up- or, at least, her illusion did. Her voice was that of Harry's. The Fallen Angel paused and glanced at the Denarian, who shrugged nonchalantly

"Doing audio and visual on the same illusion is a pain in the arse that I really can't be stuffed doing at the moment," Harry answered Dumbledore's unspoken question. "It really is a lot harder than it seems."

"I know," Dumbledore chuckled. "I have no doubt that it will become second nature to you soon enough. You have a way with magic that I rarely see. I look forward to the day when you can create hard-light illusions."

"That's just a myth," Harry snorted dismissively.

"Perhaps," Dumbledore murmured mysteriously and Harry glanced at him suspiciously.

"You don't have anything on them, do you?" He asked the Headmaster with narrowed eyes. "Hard-light illusions would be so awesome! I can just imagine the stuff I could do with them."

“While your sexual perversions are indeed fascinating,” his own voice interjected dryly. “Perhaps we can get back to the topic at hand.”

Harry scowled at Meciél, who eyed him back humorously. “Man, do I always sound like such a bastard?”

Meciél and Dumbledore exchanged glances.

“Yes,” Meciél deadpanned.

“I’m afraid so,” Dumbledore admitted.

“Go get fucked,” Harry grumbled sourly.

“Now,” Meciél commanded imperiously, although his voice coming from such a beautiful ‘woman’ did make him shudder. “I have gone over what I remember from transference with Harry and I believe what you say might be viable.”

“You cannot remember?” Dumbledore questioned. “I was led to believe that the Fallen have perfect, eidetic memories that we mere mortals could not even hope to comprehend.”

“We do,” Meciél responded quietly. Harry’s voice was so different when it came from her, calmer and more grandiose. “My categorical memory aside, you must understand that the bonding of mortal human and immortal angel is traumatic. Both Harry and I experienced a great deal of pain and even my mind cannot always pierce through the sensations that dominated the experience at the time.”

“Interesting,” Dumbledore murmured. He unconsciously smoothed over his purple-silver robes and leaned back in his chair. “How fascinating.”

He was staring at the Fallen woman with rapt attention and he had the look of an academic or scholar about him. Harry supposed he was finding everything about Meciél fascinating. The thought made him feel uneasy and a white-hot spike of jealousy surged through him. Meciél was his Fallen Angel. If Dumbledore wanted one, he could go get one of his own.

"During our bonding, though, I did notice a malignant energy centred on Harry's forehead," Meciél continued. Her illusion wavered as Harry started at that piece of news but he managed to keep it sustained. "I assumed it was the result of some injury or wound and I removed it during the assimilation."

"I see," Dumbledore murmured, stroking his beard. "And you believe that malignant energy may have been a Horcrux?"

"Perhaps," Meciél answered in Harry's voice. "I am unaware if it held any form of sentience as I quickly stripped it away with Hellfire." She cocked her head, her silver eyes raking across Dumbledore carefully. "Does that please you, boy?"

"Yes," Dumbledore answered honestly. "If Harry did indeed hold a Horcrux within him then there is little doubt left that it has been destroyed. From what I have seen of Hellfire, no Horcrux fragment could withstand such a power."

"I really like how you're talking behind my back here," Harry deadpanned. "Seriously, it's great. I think you should keep it up, maybe even write an unauthorized biography on me while you're at it."

Meciél threw him a look. "He can be such a handful," she confessed.

Dumbledore let out a genial laugh. "I have noticed."

"Right," Harry snapped and waved his wand. Meciél's illusion disappeared and Harry rounded on Dumbledore. "Just tell me about the bloody Horcrux already!"

Dumbledore's smile faded and he became serious. With a swish of his hand, the thick, heavy basin that Harry remembered as a pensieve soared from the other side of the room and landed gently on the desk.

"The Horcrux you will be searching for is in the form of a golden locket..." Dumbledore began.

He could hear the uneven, nervous pace of his servants as they carefully made their way down the hall to his Master Bedroom. He stood up as somebody knocked and his red-tinted vision fixed itself on the door.

"Come!" he demanded.

The door opened and a dark-cloaked man entered, dropping to his knee in silent subservience. He regarded the man with little thought, a peon at best. The man was a snivelling coward who had chosen to follow him out of fear rather than vision. Sometimes, he wondered whether he held more derision for his ideological enemy, mudbloods and muggles, than his personal hatred of simpering fools. It mattered little, in the end.

"Milord," the man stuttered. "We have received word. Everything is ready."

Satisfaction flared from within his cold-blooded body. Soon, decades of anger and hatred would be fulfilled in one single, perfect stroke. The servant quickly left as Lord Voldemort stared absently out of the window of his temporary refuge. With Harry Potter most likely hiding away from the mindless Ministry of Magic, he could begin his next task.

It was a dark and stormy night. Harry really hated thinking that, but there was no other way to describe it. The clouds rumbled ominously above his head every now and then as rain pelted down from the skies, splattering over the grimy rock. In the distance there were roaring waves crashing upon the cliffs, almost eclipsing the thunder above by sheer amount of noise the raging sea was making. It seemed like he was far away from civilisation- although the nearest town was quite close- and the only source of light was the blazing orb of fire hovering above his head, somehow immune to the rain.

"This sucks," Harry grumbled as he staggered over a grimy boulder, only narrowly avoiding slipping off the cliff and to his untimely incapacitation. It probably wouldn't be enough to kill him, but even

Harry would die if his body suffered from too much blunt trauma. "Fucking rain....fucking cave...fucking dark..."

The Denarian Lord could feel Meciél's amusement and kept grumbling under his breath as he climbed down the cliffs towards where the supposed hidden cave was. After a few more moments of rain pelting his water-repellent charm, Harry finally dropped onto a small outcropping on the side of the cliff and exhaled loudly.

"That was easy," he boasted as he turned his head and gazed out at the sea.

The ball of fire bobbed over his head as Harry sighed and turned around. Something caught his eye and he paused. There, on the left, was a very narrow path from the top of the cliffs to the ledge he was standing on. Harry gritted his teeth but took a deep breath and pushed the anger down. There was no use blowing shit up over spilt milk, after all. He raised his wand, levelled at the looming entrance in front of him and strode in. To his disappointment, there were very little inside. The 'cave' turned out to be a small, cramped space within the rock. Harry frowned, checking every facet of the cave very carefully.

"Well," Harry declared after a moment. "This looks like it's been a big waste of my time."

'Indeed,' Meciél murmured in his head and he could feel her reaching out with his senses in an unsuccessful attempt to perceive something he couldn't.

Harry sighed and began poking the walls of the cave with his wand. Outside, the wind howled and the ever-quickenening crescendo of rain signified that the storm was worsening. Harry was just about to say 'fuck it' and try his hand at removing one of the walls by force when his wand suddenly quivered after a particularly hard poke of the rocky wall on the left. He paused, frowning, and poked the wall again.

"Ooh. Secret entrance," Harry muttered. He took a deep breath and brandished his wand over his head. "I know just how to deal with this! Open Sesame!"

The rocky, grimy wall remained a rocky grimy wall and Harry rolled his eyes. He did not have the patience to be guessing passwords or secret keyholes or whatever bullshit Voldemort had decided to put up to annoy the hell out of anybody trying to destroy his immortality

“Stuff it,” Harry growled. “Frendo!”

The small cave was filled with a blinding purple light and the roar that accompanied it put the raging seas and bellowing thunder to shame. Harry’s wand buckled and the smell of sulphur reeked through the cave as Hellfire empowered the already powerful piece of dark magic and sent it surging towards the secret entrance. There was a flash of blue and the blazing cone of purple light was suddenly sucked into the rock wall without any noticeable effect.

Almost immediately afterwards, the cave floor shook and rumbled beneath Harry’s feet and he heard a rough, gravely grinding noise. He spun around and his eyes widened as the entrance to the cave moved slowly towards the ground. Before he could cast a spell, the walls and roof stopped moving. Harry turned back to the innocuous cave wall and narrowed his eyes dangerously.

‘I see...’ Meciél murmured. Harry cocked an eyebrow and waited for the Fallen to continue. ‘I’ve been analysing the magical make-up of the ward and I think I know how to open it.’

“Not as fun as blowing it up, but fire away,” Harry declared, feeling a little more cheerful all of a sudden.

‘The enchantment seeks payment rather than a password,’ Meciél continued. ‘From what I can tell, you need to sacrifice something to it, something personal. I...wait.’

Harry waited for Meciél to do her mental thingy. He had no practical idea of what she was doing but that was the case for many things she seemed to be able to do in his head.

‘Blood,’ Meciél declared at last. ‘To open the door, you need to sacrifice a portion of blood. The caster of wards may have assumed

that such an attempt would weaken a person or may have wanted some physical proof or a conduit of attack for later use.'

"It wants blood?" Harry asked doubtfully, looking at the war. At Meciél's mental confirmation, Harry let out a snort of disgust. "Fuck that."

'I can try to devise a way to subdue the ward...' Meciél began, but Harry's mind was already whirring.

"Does it have to be my blood?" he asked carefully and grinned when Meciél immediately spotted the solution to their problem. "Ooh! I know exactly who I'm going to use too."

Nathaniel Anderson was a small-time, petty crook with the pedigree of a Pureblood and the magical talent of a kneazle. He would be the first person to admit that his life wasn't the most glamorous or exciting. While many of his fellow Purebloods had joined the Dark Lord's noble crusade against the mudbloods and the inept Ministry of Magic as marked and cloaked Death Eaters, Nathaniel had chosen to serve the Dark Lord in a more discreet manner- by handling and shipping useful artefacts that one day may be useful. Sometimes it was a barrel of boomslang skin that had 'mysteriously vanished' from the nearest Apothecary. Other days, Nathaniel might make a simple error on a postage order that would cost the Department of Magical Law Enforcement four times the gold for their new enchanted robes.

He was well aware that there were certain parties, Aurors, Hit Wizards and the like, that occasionally staked him out but he was very careful and confident that even if they did find something to charge him with, the connections he had with his family, however poor, were enough to make a lot of things disappear. With that in mind, Nathaniel was not worried in the slightest when he sat down at his favourite table in the grimy Knocturn Alley pub that he was so fond of.

He certainly wasn't expecting a hooded, cloaked figure with darkness where his or her face to be to slam open the doors in the bar, raise his wand towards him and mutter something under his breath. Nathaniel had time to look briefly surprised before agony exploded in

his head and his body was thrown back by the power of the blast. His side was aching and there was a terrible numbness in his arms. He blinked his eyes blearily as he lay there on the ground and watched as the cloaked figure glided through the flashes of colour from the spells that some of the braver patrons cast at him and weaved through the rest of the panicked, frenzied patrons to stand before him. Nathaniel gulped and tried to stammer something through the mind-numbing pain as the cloaked figure knelt down, picked up his right arm and simply disappeared from sight.

Harry reappeared in the cave with a loud crack and grinned brightly at the so-far impenetrable secret entrance, a meaty, blood-soaked severed limb in his hands. He absently dispelled the charms hiding his apparition signature from the Ministry and strode over to the door with an air of smug satisfaction. The Denarian carefully rubbed the bloody stump of the arm on the rock wall, grimacing when he heard the sound of bone scraping against a hard surface.

For a moment, an arched outline appeared there, blazing white as though there was a bright light behind the door. Then, the rock simply vanished, leaving an opening that led to utter blackness. Harry peered down into the tunnel and carelessly through the severed limb to the side. The ball of shining light bobbed through the air as Harry sent it down the corridor and followed after it. After a few moments, the Denarian found himself standing at the edge of a great black lake.

It spread out before his eyes, so vast that he could not see an end to it. The cavern was large enough that Harry couldn't even make out the roof above. What really captured his attention was the greenish glow at the centre of the lake, a distant smudge on the horizon that almost beckoned him to come closer.

Harry felt uneasy at the entire setup. As cliché as it all seemed, the darkness that drenched the cavern seemed to roll over and writhe around the light emanating from his charm, as if it was different from normal darkness, more alive and dangerous. There was no visible path towards the greenish glow and as Harry surveyed the inky waters of the lake, he suspected that it would be a bad idea to actually go into it. There was a putrid smell in the cavern that Harry

could recognise from personal experience and he had no desire to meet the thing responsible for decaying flesh unprepared.

“If I was an evil, vicious dark lord who had split his soul and wanted to keep the piece hidden away, how would I make sure I could go and see it whenever I wanted to while keeping other people out?” Harry mused to himself.

‘Perhaps Voldemort would have brought along a broom with him?’ Meciél suggested.

Harry was spared from answering when something big and silent swooped through the air towards him. He caught a glimpse of beady black eyes before he threw himself to the ground and watched as an enormous bat; twice the size of himself at least, raked its claws through his glowing ball of light. It was snuffed out in a heartbeat and the gliding bat swooped up into the perpetual darkness that hid the roof from view.

‘I’m going to say that that’s a no,’ Harry thought wryly as he stood back up, only a little edgy about being surrounded by darkness.

‘Close your eyes,’ Meciél instructed and Harry obeyed. There was a sudden flash of light from the back of his eyelids and suddenly his vision was restored, as if the area was still it. It was a tad strange as everything was deathly still. Harry could spot the tiniest of ripples in the lake and noted they were frozen in place. ‘This is the last image you saw of the lake before the light went out. Barring any new obstructions, it should help.’

‘Thanks,’ Harry thought gratefully, content to remain quiet for now. ‘Now, how do we cross the lake?’

‘Voldemort must have left himself a way to get there,’ Meciél murmured thoughtfully.

Harry was beginning to get annoyed. The stifling silence of the cave and the eerie darkness that surrounded and pressed in on him was nerve-wracking, even for him. Gringotts had been a pain in the arse to break into but at least it had been fun and there had been some

form of companionship as well- another warm body between him and the many things that had been trying to kill him. He raised his wand and swept it over the banks, extending his senses through his magic and trying to see if there was anything useful hidden away. Something registered and Harry made his way towards a section of the bank of the lake. There was nothing there, but Harry frowned and carefully extended his wand. It tapped against something metal and Harry grinned. His vision faded away for a split-second as Harry dispelled the charm and realised that he had just found a long chain that extended deep into the water. Carefully and quietly, Harry tapped the chain and watched as it slid through his first like a snake. He winced at the loud, cranking noise it was making as it slowly pulled out a small, wooden rowboat from the depths of the lake.

Harry exhaled noisily after the boat had been pulled up to the shore of the lake and ran his hand through his hair. In some small way, Harry was relishing the tenseness of the situation. It was quite exhilarating for him. Voldemort really had chosen a nice atmosphere for this Horcrux.

“Do you think it would work?” Harry asked softly. If the giant bats of doom hadn’t swooped down at him after that racket, then his voice shouldn’t worry them much either. “It does look kind of dodgy.”

‘You can try,’ Meciell said with the mental equivalent of a shrug.

Harry took a deep breath, Hellfire racing through his body in the event of something screwing up, and put a foot in the boat. He waited for a moment, but nothing happened, so he stepped right into it. The wood creaked in protest but did not crumble away, something Harry took to be a good sign. Harry sat down in the boat, staring into the inky depths of the lake, and waited patiently.

Nothing happened.

Harry frowned. “Er...now what?” he asked out loud. He prodded the boat with his wand but nothing happened. Harry sighed. “For fucks sake...”

‘I can detect an enchantment on the boat but for some reason you do not meet the criteria to activate it,’ Meciél explain. He could feel her give the mental equivalent of a shrug. ‘Without knowing more about the depths of wand-wizard lore, I could not give you an explanation.’

This was beginning to get irksome.

With a surge of Hellfire, Harry swung his wand around his head and forcefully shattered the enchantment that lay on the boat. A great chime sung through the air and little sparks of golden light rained down upon him like shards of crystal. With another swish of his wand, the boat began to slowly move away from the banks and towards the green, glowing island in the middle of the lake. He sat back down, satisfied for the moment.

“You probably shouldn’t have done that,” Meciél’s illusion said quietly as it appeared on the bench opposite Harry. If she had been tangible, it would have become very cramped in the boat.

“Ah, what’s the worst that could possibly happen?” Harry replied casually.

A moment passed. Harry and Meciél remained quiet, the former darting his eyes up and around him in search of something. “That’s just stupid,” Harry muttered as the boat continued to glide across the water. “Don’t they know that the perfect time to attack is after somebody says something stupid like that?”

“Who’s ‘they’ and why would you want them to attack?” Meciél asked curiously. While it was still dark, the greenish glow of the looming island coupled with Meciél’s silvery aura was making the surroundings more and more visible.

“They? They is they,” Harry answered sagely. “And I just know I’m going to have to deal with them sooner or later- I might as well make it sooner.”

One of Meciél’s eyebrows rose up and she opened her mouth to respond, when suddenly the little wooden boat thumped onto something. A shudder ran through the wood and Harry had to steady

himself as the boat began to slow down. Cautiously, he lifted up his wand and peered at the front of the boat. It was stuck on something, a log or some piece of debris that was impeding their movement. Harry sighed and flicked his wand, but the object resisted his attempts to banish it aside. Harry rolled his eyes and crawled to the front of the boat. Without much concern, he reached out and gave the piece of debris a good push on its...soft surface?

"What the...?" Harry muttered as the piece of debris flipped over in the water.

He jerked back, surprise and shock flooding his system, as the ghoulish, dead eyes of a male corpse stared back at him. Its pearly white skin was flaky and rotten and its tattered clothes had almost dissolved away. Harry took a deep breath and tried to calm his rapidly beating heart.

"That was the most incredibly freaky thing I've ever seen in my life," Harry confessed to nobody in particular.

There was a sudden noise of splintering wood and something tore through the bottom of the boat and grabbed his ankle. Harry's head shot down as the dead, rotten hand clasped his ankle with strength any normal human would have trouble matching. There was a rustle in front of him and Harry had the time to widen his eyes before the corpse that the boat had hit threw itself at him, clutching him around the throat and toppling him overboard.

Harry gagged as he was dragged under the putrid water, the stench of rotten flesh and other unnameable substances filling his nostrils. The zombies, or whatever the hell they were, kept dragging him down and the greenish light from the island reflecting on the water's surface grew dimmer and dimmer. Harry allowed himself to be dragged down, only feeling the slightest bit of concern as more and more dead people swam towards him and clutched at his clothes.

After a few moments, Harry sighed- or released some bubbles- and withdrew two large wings of bone from the centre of his back. He sliced several of the zombies off and managed to free his arm long enough to cast a bubblehead charm. Water parted away from his

face and Harry let out the deep breath he was holding in his lungs. The situation, while mildly entertaining, wasn't really threatening.

"Zombie critters, huh?" Harry remarked inside the bubble head charm as he batted some more aside and raised his wand.

Hellfire flashed on the runes and a jet of boiling water (rather than the fire he was trying to conjure) shot out towards the mass of corpses. They were pulled along by the powerful current the spell created, blistering and dissolving as the boiling water washed over them. Harry extended his wings behind him and, as more came towards him, he gave them a mighty push and propelled himself through the grimy, mucky water, leaving the zombies far behind.

Deciding it was probably quicker to swim and knowing his boat had been ripped apart by some pretty stupid zombies, Harry made his way for the green speck of light, using his wings as a giant pair of flippers and zipping through the water. It was almost relaxing when one stopped remembering the army of the dead underneath trying to pull you under. While they weren't that big of a threat, Harry really didn't like the feeling of their cold, clammy hands on his skin. After a few moments of swimming, Harry felt his legs hit hard rock and he collapsed his wings and stood up on the banks of the small, rocky outcrop nestled in the middle of the lake.

The first thing he noticed was the green glow coming from a stone basin in the centre of the little island. Harry shook his head, water and little pieces of rotten flesh flying out of his hair, and approached the stone basin with caution. It was filled with an eerily glowing potion and Harry could faintly make out the golden locket underneath.

"There you are," Harry chided with a smirk. He wagged his wand. "You've been such a pain in the arse to find, you know?"

Harry started to reach into the potion when he stopped and considered his options. After everything Voldemort had put up stop somebody getting in, it probably wasn't the best idea to be touching the stuff. Sure, he could grow his hand back but it would hurt like a bitch if the potion was some kind of acid. Harry pointed his wand at the potion.

“Accio!”

Nothing happened.

“Didn’t think so,” Harry said cheerfully and he circled the basin, looking for an avenue of attack. With a bit of wand-waving, Harry conjured a stick and carefully put it in the potion. The stick remained a stick as opposed to dissolving into nothingness and Harry used it to try to pry the locket off the bottom of the basin with very little success. Finally, Harry threw the stick away, extended his wing and used his daemonic, hellfire-enhanced strength instead. He grunted in exertion, the wing straining against the fragile-looking locket, until finally, with one last big tug, Harry lost his footing and fell flat on his arse. The wing came zooming out of the basin, ripping through the ground with incredible force and absolutely pulverising a large section of the rocky outcrop into dust.

“Fuck!” Harry swore, his irritation mounting once again. He kicked at the ground and blinked when something metal clattered away.

The object turned out to be a small goblet and Harry looked at the potion doubtfully. He was beginning to get an idea of what he was supposed to do and it was actually a pretty damn cunning idea of Voldemort’s. He attempted to pour the potion out to the side but it remained glued to the cup.

“I am not drinking that,” Harry declared firmly and threw the cup away. “Fuck it. I’ll do what I always do!”

Fiendfyre roared to life as Harry conjured a great serpent of roaring cursed flame, which wrapped itself around the basin. The potion began to hiss and boil as the fiendfyre ate through the stone and Harry grinned as he twirled his wand. The fiendfyre enveloped the basin and Harry let out a laugh as it exploded in a small mushroom-cloud of green flames. The explosion rocked the small island and sent whizzing pieces of debris right into Harry’s torso, which he ignored in favour of observing the remains of the basin closely. All that did remain was a small crater and glowing, molten rock and Harry cracked his knuckles in satisfaction.

“Awesome. Only...what, two left?” Harry declared thoughtfully. “Voldemort’s going to be a dead fucker really soon...”

Draco Malfoy edged into the Room of Requirement, his pale hair matted with sweat and his hands shaking. He approached a large cabinet and prostrated himself beneath it as it slowly swung open. Cloaked, silver-masked Death Eaters glided forward and fanned out across the room as Lord Voldemort stepped into the halls of Hogwarts for the first time in over 30 years.

“Now, Mr. Malfoy,” Lord Voldemort murmured appreciatively, a bony hand patting the young Malfoy on the shoulder. “Tell me, is Albus Dumbledore still in the castle?”

“Y-Yes, milord,” Malfoy mumbled quietly.

“Excellent!” Voldemort’s crimson eyes flared with satisfaction and he stood up, the very darkness draping around him like a cloak. “Bellatrix, Dolohov, you know what to do. If you’ll excuse me, I need to go see a man about a wand.”

A/N: Hey guys. This chapter and the next one have been done for about a week, but there's been some heavy revision and edits to make them more realistic and remove plot holes and the like. I've plotted out the rest of the Denarian series and have decided that it will end at Chapter 36- which will be an epilogue. So, really, only five more chapters to conclude the Voldemort arc. This'll be easily done before Christmas.

Amanda Carpenter awoke from her nightmare with a loud scream, shooting upright in her bed in a fit of absolute terror. She blinked rapidly at the dark dormitory that surrounded her, her heart pounding in her chest as panic and terror surged through her. She was covered in sweat and her eyes were frantic, dilating rapidly as a light was switched on. Something touched her on the shoulder and she let out a startled shriek, scooting over her bed in an instant and fumbling for her wand.

"Whoa! Amanda! Take it easy!" Lavender Brown said soothingly, backing away with her hands up and eyeing Amanda's wand warily. "It's just me!"

Amanda squinted at her, her heart throbbing and the beginnings of a headache forming. The vividness and urgency of the nightmare had been unbelievable and even now the after-effects were playing havoc with her mind. Slowly, she began to take deep breaths and tried to calm herself down as Hermione, Pavarti and Lavender crowded around her bed nervously, looking concerned and anxious. Finally, Amanda was able to manage a weak smile and she looked up at the girls.

"Sorry," she mumbled, suddenly feeling abashed and embarrassed. "I...must have had a nightmare."

"Merlin, Amanda," Pavarti moaned, placing a dark-skinned hand over her nightgown. "I thought you were being attacked or something."

"It was just..." Amanda trailed off.

Hermione came and sat next to her, placing a hand on her shoulder. Amanda could barely feel it as her eyes glazed over. For her, the nightmare had not ended- if anything, the sense of urgency and the throbbing behind her eyes was getting worse and worse. She clutched her forehead and groaned, shaking her head and sending her sweat-soaked hair everywhere.

“Amanda! What’s wrong?” Hermione asked urgently.

What was wrong? Amanda tried to puzzle over the question as the utter need to do something blazed in her body, causing the hair on the back of her neck to stand up on end and every nerve in her body to sizzle expectantly. Her body was pumped and ready.

“What’s that?” Lavender gasped and pointed under Amanda’s bed.

Amanda followed her hand and her eyes widened as she saw a silvery glow pulse beneath her four-poster bed. She quickly dropped to her knees and pulled out a long, wooden walking stick. The glow seemed to be coming from below the wood itself and Amanda carefully extracted a long, silver blade, which was sizzling with a strange silver light. The rest of her friends gasped but Amanda ignored them as she reverently ran a hand over the silver blade. Suddenly, everything felt alright, as if the world had straightened up again and Amanda was filled with a purpose.

Oh.

So that’s what that nightmare meant.

“Something bad is about to happen,” Amanda said softly. She tucked the blade back into her sheath and quickly stood up. The girls watched, stupefied, as Amanda dashed around the room, throwing a loose robe over her nightgown and picking up her wand from the night table.

“Amanda?” Hermione called and frowned crossly when the blonde-haired Knight ignored her. “Amanda!”

Amanda dashed down the stairs to the dormitory and the other girls followed suit. As she reached the portrait, she stopped. The girls halted behind her, looking very confused. Then, at the same time, a sudden gong rang through the castle and Professor McGonagall's voice rang out, stern and uncompromising.

"Attention, students! The castle has been infiltrated by Death Eaters! You are to remain in your common rooms at all times! Do not leave under any circumstances! I repeat, remain in your common rooms and do not leave! You will be safe there! Do not leave!"

There was a sudden crash and Professor McGonagall's voice hitched.

"You!" she gasped. There was a sudden bang and a high-pitched cackle- Professor McGonagall screamed an incantation and suddenly everything was silent.

Amanda felt her hands clench and she felt her jaw settle in determination. Yes. This was her purpose. This was what the sword wanted her to do. Barely hearing the sudden hubbub around her, Amanda turned around and cast an eye over the other students. She felt calm, too calm considering the circumstances, and her mouth was dry.

"Hermione, Ron," her voice croaked out, distant, as if somebody else was speaking. "Nobody leaves here. Use anything Harry taught you in the DA and make them stay."

Ron nodded resolutely while Hermione frowned at her suspiciously. "Where are you going?" she demanded. "You heard Professor McGonagall!"

"I'm going out there," Amanda told her firmly.

Ron looked like he had some objections. "Hey, we can help! Let us go too!"

Amanda shook her head and pulled the sword out of the cane. Silver light flared across the blade in a sudden burst of light and both Ron and Hermione fell silent. "No," she murmured distantly. "You can't."

Out of every possible action Albus had predicted that Lord Voldemort might take, this was the absolute worst that he had considered. The Headmaster strode across his office clad in sleeping robes, barely aware of his nightcap bobbing in his eyes as he surveyed the magical instruments lining one of his many shelves. Above him, the portraits were quiet. Even Phinneas, who usually had something derogatory to say about Albus's choice of dress, could understand the urgency of the situation.

How was it that Lord Voldemort had been able to set a foot in this castle?

"Oh dear," Dumbledore breathed in as he tapped one of the instruments with his wands. The blocky, rectangular artefact glowed with a dim, crimson light. Albus darted to the other side of the room with nimbleness surprising for somebody of his age. The results of the other instruments did not please him.

"Albus!" one of the former Headmasters croaked. Albus jerked his head out of the green puffs of smoke being emitted from one of spindly, delicate instruments. "Beatrice says there are twelve Death Eaters on the third floor!"

"Fenrir Greyback is prowling around the Great Hall!" Headmaster Dippet's portrait informed him worriedly.

Albus looked grim and he felt a great weariness settle in his bones. Some of the Wizarding World's greatest monsters had been set loose in his school and there was nothing he could do, not just yet. From the corner, Fawkes let out a loud trill and Albus felt a great weight lift off of his shoulders. It was ready. The Headmaster strode across the room and approached his desk, where Fawkes and a complex series of glowing instruments lay on an extremely detailed map of Hogwarts.

"It is almost ready," he murmured to himself, stroking his beard. He had to force himself to remain patient as he quickly raced over class schedules and professor timetables in his mind. There was nobody scheduled to- Albus froze.

Yes, there was.

He faintly recalled Aurora complaining about the shocking behaviour of her second year Hufflepuff and Slytherin class early that day. If his old brain recalled correctly, she mentioned offhandedly...that...she was going to keep them in tonight! Albus took a deep breath as his eyes flittering shut in dawning horror. Not every student was in their common room.

Very well then. It could not be helped. The safety of the majority of the students took precedence and once Albus was done, he would personally escort the Second Years to his office and evacuate them himself before joining the battle that was undoubtedly raging on below his feet right at this very moment.

He stood above the map and glowing instruments and placed both hands, his burned, scarred one included, on two sparkling crystal balls. He closed his eyes and allowed the fire of Summer to fill his veins, empowering his already potent magic. The castle moaned and grumbled around him as Dumbledore used the map before him as a conduit, sending his magic surging through the old stone. An incantation boomed from his voice and Dumbledore closed his eyes as a bright surge of light filled his office.

The light subsided and faded away and Albus let go of the crystal balls. The map beneath them was charged and being eaten away by small flickering flames and the magical instruments had shattered in many pieces around them- but they had served their purpose. Albus breathed a sigh of relief and slouched down for a moment, before the urgency of the situation overtook him and he straightened up again.

"Dippet, I need you to..." Albus was cut-off mid sentence as one of the twirling silver objects on his shelf let out a loud, warbling shriek, not dissimilar to the death cry of a banshee. The Headmaster froze in shock for a split-second and bowed his heads in grief.

Professor Sinistra had just been murdered.

With a sudden surge of emotion, Albus twirled his wand and his pyjamas were switched with his normal robes. The Headmaster of

Hogwarts, the most powerful wizard in recent times, stood in his office, clad in his purple and silver robes and his normally twinkling blue eyes alight with his cold fury, before he twirled on his feet and disappeared without so much as a pop.

The Ministry of Magic was in chaos when Kingsley Shacklebolt arrived, clad in his Auror robes and his normally relaxed face taut with stress. He absently brushed his robes off as he sped through the Atrium, pushing past hundreds of milling, worried Hogwarts students.

What on earth was going on?

Fireplaces all around him were flaring as more and more wizards and witches answered the Ministry's summons. Kingsley finally spotted Tonks, who was talking rapidly with a pale Ron and a frantic Hermione. He approached her and tapped her on the shoulder.

"What is it?" Kingsley demanded.

"Death Eaters!" Hermione blurted. "At Hogwarts!"

Kingsley's eyes widened. "Tonks! Find Robinson! Tell him to recall every Auror unit and place them on high alert!" Tonks nodded frantically and dashed away. Kingsley turned and yelled over the crowd. "Williamson! Get the Emergency Response team geared up and ready to go!"

"Hogwarts, sir?" Williamson yelled back, looking grim.

Kingsley gave the faintest of nods and the red-haired Auror swore and disappeared with a loud crack. Kingsley turned back to the chaos, wincing as frantic wizards and witches pushed through the crowd, looking for their beloved children.

Shit. Hogwarts. He could not see how it could get worse.

Albus silently appeared in the Astronomy Tower, peering over his half-moon glasses at his surroundings. He had appeared right outside Aurora's classroom, but the lights had been dimmed and nearby portrait had been slashed to pieces. A cloaked and masked Death

Eater that was standing by the door of the Astronomy Classroom turned towards him, his body language showing his surprise and dismay at Albus's sudden appearance, but he didn't even get a chance to raise his wand. Albus swished his wand and the man spun through the air with great force, ricocheting off the roof and bouncing across the floor as iron chains and impenetrable stocks imprisoned unconscious the Death Eater.

Drawing his cloak closer to his body and absently charming himself to fight off the cold, Albus approached the door to the classroom and tapped himself on the head. A shiver ran down his spine as an invisibility charm, thrice as hard to perform as the Disillusionment charm and almost impossible to detect, wrapped around him and cloaked him from view. Albus cast another silent spell and, taking a deep breath and fearing the worse, walked up to and through the door as if he was a ghost.

Albus closed his eyes as his head passed through solid matter and opened them when he had stepped into the room. His eyes ran over it in a heartbeat as he assessed the situation. The chairs and tables had been overturned, many of them strewn across the room as if thrown there by great force. The night sky was clear and thousands of stars twinkled down at him. The children were all huddled in one of the corner, many of them weeping softly and shivering in their Hogwarts robes. Albus put aside the stirrings of anger in his stomach at the sight of the weeping children and gazed down at Professor Sinistra. The woman was still beautiful in death, her long, glimmering dark hair spread out around her and her gorgeous eyes wide open with shock. The Headmaster did not need an autopsy to know what had killed the poor woman.

Suddenly, Albus stiffened. His head still bowed, he listened as the door behind him slowly opened and allowed the invisibility charm to fade away, knowing that he had already been detected. The Second Years gasped at his sudden appearance, but it was nothing compared to the sudden deathly silence as loud, hollow footsteps entered the classroom. Albus took a deep breath and turned around, his hardened blue eyes staring down his opponent furiously.

“Good evening, Professor Dumbledore,” Lord Voldemort greeted smoothly. His crimson eyes flickered with perverted pleasure and his slit-like nostrils flared with sudden delight as he twirled his wand in his fingers. “It’s such a beautiful night, is it not?”

“Tom,” Dumbledore greeted with barely a whisper. His entire body radiated cold, calculated anger and the sheer presence of it was enough to send Voldemort’s two Death Eater escorts scampering back. “You should not have come here tonight. It will be your undoing.”

The words were a promise.

Lord Voldemort let loose with a high-pitched laugh. “Dumbledore, Dumbledore, Dumbledore,” he chided, wagging his wand at the Headmaster as if he were a petulant child. “So confident, even in the face of a far superior wizard. But, then, apparently you have always been like that.”

Dumbledore put aside a faint sense of unease at those words and squared his shoulders. He knew his face was now relaxed and uncaring, as if Lord Voldemort did not bother him at the slightest. More than mudbloods, Tom hated it when his presence was ignored or disregarded- he always had.

“You are right, of course,” the old man murmured, stroking a beard with his blackened, gnarled hand and clasping his wand loosely with his other. He gazed up at the sky fondly. “It is such a beautiful night. One must wonder then, why you have chosen to come here when I am sure that there are a great many things you could be doing than attempting to raze my school.”

“Raze your school?” Voldemort repeated and he shook his head almost-pityingly. “Oh, how you underestimate your value, Albus Dumbledore. The school does not interest me at the moment. No, Dumbledore, I have come here for you.”

“Brave,” Albus noted and he took a couple of steps towards Voldemort, ignoring the two Death Eaters who had raised their wands at his sudden movements. Clear blue eyes peered into Voldemort’s

crimson gaze, as if the serpentine man would reveal all of his secrets. "Foolish, yes, but brave. You will find that I am not such an easy opponent."

"You are old." Voldemort sounded amused.

"Where age has sapped my strength, it has given me wisdom," Albus countered mildly. "You will not kill me so easily. Nor, will I allow you or your servants to harm anybody else within this school. Those who attempt to do so will, unfortunately, have to die."

"Dumbledore!" Voldemort gasped in mock-surprise and the shadows around him boiled with his dark power. "You senile old man. It is not your death that I seek, although I must admit that the very thought of bringing you to your knees fills me with satisfaction."

Albus was silent. In the corner, one of the students let out a sniff.

"No," Voldemort breathed and there was a sudden hunger and need in his eyes. "There is something else that I desire, something I want above anything else. "

"Oh?" Albus uttered calmly. "Now, what could I possibly have that you would place a value on it greater than my life?"

"I think you know, Dumbledore," Voldemort spat out, his pleasant manner disappearing. He raised a bony arm and extended a pale finger at Dumbledore's wand. "I want your wand, you miserable excuse for a wizard! I want the Death Stick!"

Albus couldn't help his sudden intake of breath and he knew his eyes had widened behind his half-moon glasses. Voldemort looked triumphant as dismay and shock warred through the old man's body. How had Lord Voldemort discovered the existence of one of his greatest secrets?

"I see," Albus murmured, allowing his surprise to fade away from his face- even as his heart raced and his blood pumped madly through his body. "You must forgive me, Tom. I was surprised that a wizard of your calibre would believe in such a fanciful tale."

"I'm sorry, perhaps I misspoke," Voldemort apologised, not sounding very sorry at all. He prowled around the doorway to the classroom, his cloak whirling around his thin, sickly frame as if it were alive. "Perhaps you are more comfortable with the term 'Wand of Destiny'. No? Then, perhaps you know it as the 'Elder Wand'. Names aside, I know that you are fully aware of what I'm talking about."

Albus stared down at Voldemort and then shook his head with feigned humour. "Oh dear," he chuckled lightly and Voldemort's eyes darkened with anger. "First, you fall into darkness and then you fall into madness. I know that there are many people who believe that there is no distinction between the two but I always thought you were more intelligent than this. What happened to the Head Boy who gained the highest scores on his NEWTS since, well, me?"

Voldemort did not say a word. He stood there, his crimson eyes boring into Albus and the Dark Lord looked like he was considering something. Then, he raised a hand and Albus tensed, his fingers tightening around his wand and his magic buzzing to be released, a vicious spell that would rend Lord Voldemort asunder and scatter his body to the four corners of the world. Then, there was a shimmer from amongst the students and Albus watched as four of them rose out from the effects of Polyjuice and levelled their wands at the students. Several of them let out loud screams and backed away, moving closer to the wall. Dumbledore squared his shoulders and his face went blank, as if it were carved from stone.

"Threatening children, Tom?" He said quietly. "Is that how you can get people to fear you?"

Voldemort ignored him. "By the way," he said conversationally. "If you call your phoenix, they will all die immediately. Perhaps you will save some of them- but some is not all."

Albus ducked his head and peered at Voldemort with dangerous eyes. Every nerve in his body screamed for action, screamed for him to lift his wand and take the first step in removing his greatest mistake from the face of the earth. His head, of course, won over his heart and Albus waited. Depending on the level of security and difficulty of his

task, Harry might not be back for some time. Albus would not be surprised that, after completing his task, Harry decided to simply go his own way like he frequently did.

No. This was not Harry's battle at the moment. This was his battle.

"Hello, children," Voldemort said quietly and cast his gaze over the children. Many of them flinched. "I'm going to tell you a story and I want you all to listen very carefully. This is a very important story. In fact," he hissed with great delight. "You could say that your very lives rest upon it."

"Once upon a time there was a boy, a very powerful and intelligent boy. Like all people with power, this boy lusted after more power. He made friends with all of the right people and sought out magic far beyond most mere wizards and witches. This boy became a man and, with his greatest friend, went on an adventure to find a great treasure that would make him all but invincible."

Dumbledore closed his eyes, grief playing over his face as Voldemort's serpent-like voice washed over his ears.

"Then, one day, the man was confronted by his brother. The brother wanted the boy to stop his quest for power. The man's best friend wanted him to come with him and find ultimate power. The man's brother wanted him to stay home and look after his family. As they all fought each other, the man lost control of his power and slaughtered his innocent little sister, right before the eyes of his best friend and his brother."

Voldemort turned his head towards Dumbledore and his eyes gleamed with malice.

"He tore her into tiny little pieces!" The Dark Lord hissed with great relish. "He obliterated her body with a single curse! He murdered his own flesh and blood! All of this, so he could sate his thirst for power. Horrified by what he had done, the man repented and hunted down his friend. He spent the rest of his life attempting to make up for what he had done until decades later he is faced with a similar dilemma."

"The man must now once again choose between his power and innocent lives," Voldemort concluded. Dumbledore could feel that his eyes were slightly wet. "So, tell me, Headmaster. Will Albus Dumbledore do the right thing this time?" He leaned forward until Albus could smell his putrid breath brushing across his face. "Will you save them when you could not save Arianna?"

Albus jerked as if he had been struck and took a staggered step backwards. He could feel his good hand trembling, could feel the sweat beading down his forehead, even as he chastised himself and tried to regain control. If Lord Voldemort had been willing, he could have struck Albus Dumbledore down right there without any trouble but the twisted abomination of a man was clearly enjoying himself.

"Oh dear," Voldemort murmured pityingly. He reached out and stroked the hair of a slight, brunette girl almost-lovingly. The girl whimpered in fright and shrunk back. "I'm sorry, little girl. It appears that Albus Dumbledore is at a loss of what to do."

"Voldemort..." Dumbledore exhaled quietly, almost pleadingly.

"This is a turning point in your life, Headmaster," Voldemort declared and continued to pet the girl's hair. "Albus Dumbledore, you are Headmaster of Hogwarts, Head of the Wizengamot, a world-renowned wizard of impeccable ethics and morals. You are a paragon of fairness, discriminator against none and the epitome of good in this world. So tell me, will you choose the Elder Wand, your power, over your morals, these young, innocent lives."

Albus hesitated and hated himself for doing so. It was not that he desired this power. On the contrary, Albus had spent the better part of his life protecting this horrible, cursed weapon from the greedy clutches of the wicked and hateful, knowing full-well that the Elder wand, in the wrong hands, would be a terrible tool of magic. But, to give Voldemort the Elder wand...it was incomprehensible. Every facet of logic within him screamed for him to say no, to dismiss the lives of the children as already lost, no matter how much it pained him, and strike down Voldemort as best he could.

His heart, however, disagreed.

There was no reason to believe that Voldemort would spare the children regardless. There was no reason to believe that Voldemort would not turn his wand upon them as soon as he had what he wanted. Yet, Albus could still not raise his wand and condemn those children, his students, to their fate.

Voldemort waited patiently for an answer, appearing to be quite content in allowing the Headmaster time to think. Albus suspected that the man was wary of the powers of the Elder wand and did not want to force a duel until it was apparent that he could quickly and confidently win. It pained him to say, but Albus did not know if he could defeat or even hold off a Lord Voldemort armed with the Death Stick.

"Tell me," Albus said softly. "Do you really fear Harry Potter that much that you would seek out this cursed weapon? Does his power intimidate yours to that great of an extent?"

"Fear," Voldemort answered. "Lust, desire, need- my motivations matter little to your eventual decision. What is important to you is what I want. I want that wand." He cocked his head and smiled sinisterly. "Do not trouble yourself with anything else."

Albus said nothing.

"I sense you are in conflict," Voldemort murmured. "Perhaps...yes, perhaps I can make this easier for you." He waved his wand and every second year student suddenly went rigid. A hazy mist formed around their face and when it settled, over twenty identical faces of Arianna Dumbledore stared back at him with teary eyes.

"Save us, brother!" they all chorused at one, pleading with him, begging him for their lives. Dumbledore closed his eyes and a tear trickled down his cheek. "Save us! Please! Don't let us die again! Save us! Don't kill us again!"

"Don't kill us again!" Voldemort mimicked and let out a high-pitched laugh. He shook his head, looking extraordinarily happy. "I have to admit, Dumbledore, this is the most fun I have had in...well, ever!"

The mirth in his voice was not lost on Albus.

“Now,” Voldemort spoke and his voice became deadly serious once more. He leaned forward, intent on the answer, and the wands of the Death Eaters inched ever-so-closer to the unnaturally still students with the faces of Arianna Dumbledore. “Tell me of your answer. Do it quickly, and I may even be merciful and allow your precious little students to go free.”

Albus attempted to block the face of his long departed little sister on the Second Years, his blood racing. He had no illusions that Voldemort was capable of mercy- every act of the Dark Lord's was taken with the sole purpose of appeasing that man's desires and wishes. Lord Voldemort was only ever merciful to make himself feel superior to those weaker than him. Perhaps...there was a chance that Voldemort would be amused enough to let them go. Perhaps Voldemort was fickle enough...perhaps he would be too distracted...perhaps it would work...

The alternative was no better. If he didn't hand over the wand, then Voldemort would kill them. Albus would attack, Voldemort would undoubtedly flee and, in the end, nothing would have been gained. No. Albus needed to buy time and pray that Harry would return shortly. Albus could not send these children to their deaths.

Not again.

The Headmaster did not say a word but his shoulders sagged as his emotions ran ragged through his veins. With that simple concession of defeat, Voldemort knew he had won and his high-pitched victorious laugh echoed around the Astronomy Tower.

“Excellent choice, Dumbledore,” Voldemort said, rubbing his hands together almost greedily. The Dark Lord looked absolutely giddy and his crimson eyes were wide with anticipation. “Parkinson! Disarm him!”

One of the Death Eaters behind Voldemort pointed his wand at Albus. “Expelliarmus!”

Albus made no move to resist as his wand was ripped out of his hand. It soared through the air and landed in the hands of Parkinson, who held it almost reverently. He turned towards his Master, his head bowed and the wand held high.

"My lord," he begun speaking in a tone of awe. "May I present to you the wand of legends..."

"Avada Kedavra!"

Albus did not flinch as Parkinson's dead body toppled lifelessly to the ground. Ignoring the sudden uneasiness of his own Death Eaters, Voldemort clicked his fingers and summed the Elder wand to his hand. Albus watched with shadowed eyes as Voldemort took a deep breath and held the wand out in front of him gingerly.

"Strange," he muttered to himself. "It feels like any other wand but there is this..." he trailed off, absorbed in his new, potent weapon. "Let's see..." He lifted the wand in the air. "Morsmordre!"

Pale green light bathed the top of the Astronomy tower in its glow as the Dark Mark appeared above the skies of Hogwarts, leering down at the ancient castle.

Albus cleared his throat, defenceless before his greatest enemy. "Send your servants away," he commanded. "Release your prisoners. Let us settle this feud between us as proper wizard's do- not with blackmail or coercion but with our wands."

Voldemort looked up. "Oh, that," he said coldly. He turned to his Death Eaters. "Take them away. Find out who is of noble descent and who bares the stink of muggle blood. Those who pure in blood are free to go." He reached down and his nostrils flared as he inhaled the scent of the girl whose hair he had been stroking. "Those who stink of muggle filth..." he murmured.

"Don't!" Albus commanded, his ire rising in his widened eyes.

“Those,” Voldemort murmured with glittering eyes and he wrapped a single hand around the girl’s throat and yanked her off the ground. “Those, you dispose of like the beasts they are!”

Dumbledore took a step forward, his hand outstretched, but it was too late. A resounding crack filled the room and Dumbledore halted, his mouth open with shock and dread and horror clinging at his heart. The suddenly limp girl, her face still that of Arianna Dumbledore, was motionless as Voldemort pulled back his arm and threw her out of the Astronomy Tower window. Dumbledore rushed to the window and tried to peer down into the darkness, barely aware of the Death Eaters as they herded the students out of the room, leaving him alone with Lord Voldemort.

“Now,” Voldemort murmured. “To deal with you...”

With a sudden burst of power, Albus let his emotions spill loose and an aura of blinding hot rage spread around him. His face was tight and his eyes were terrifying as he clenched his fingers. Parkinson’s old wand sprung to his hand and he deflected a vicious curse from Voldemort with a powerful zap of magic. The curse bounced away and exploded on one of the upturned desks on the floor.

“You fool!” Albus hissed with rage and he seemed to grow in stature, his fury rising up and looming over Lord Voldemort, whose eyes were wide with shock. “If you believe that all of my power came from that wand then you will find yourself sorely mistaken!”

“Avada Kedavra!” Voldemort screeched.

A sizzling bolt of deathly light sprung forward, Dumbledore swiped his wand and one of the desks came careening across the room to intercept the curse, which exploded in a flash of green flame and a loud boom. Dumbledore raised his wand and levelled it at Voldemort.

“Mark my words, Tom,” the old man said dangerously and his robes flapped around him. “You will die tonight, by my hand or by another. There can be no other way.”

“Bold words,” Voldemort hissed dangerously and the darkness around him became dense and thick. “What gives you the right to be so...”

But Albus had heard enough of the vile man’s words tonight and he summoned his full might. His head pounded with a sudden explosion of agony and his throat contorted in ways they were not meant to as a Word of the World roared from his lips. The Astronomy Tower rocked and a bright flash and deafening boom, louder than any thunderclap and brighter than any lightning strike, exploded from the tower. Stone and rock disintegrated but Voldemort met the spell head on, his crimson eyes gleaming as the two most powerful wizards of their generations began their last and most dangerous duel yet.

A/N: First off, let us thank Inquisition, who practically demanded that I give him credit in the Authors Notes after he looked over the draft of this story's finally coming to a close with these chapters, so I won't bore you all with the authors notes. Read and enjoy, my friends.

Harry's blood surged as he sprinted towards Hogwarts, pushing his muscles to the limit and pouring copious amounts of Hellfire into his legs. He had been feeling rather triumphant when he had apparated into Hogsmeade, fully intent on giving Dumbledore the good news and then going out to grab a bite to it. As he had strolled closer to the castle, it had become apparent that something was wrong. Even now, Harry couldn't put a finger on it about what had set him off, but the gigantic flash of light that blasted from every single window of the ancient school had been a sure sign that something was going on inside.

"Morsmordre!"

Harry paused and his eyes widened with shock as the caresses of that dark, horrible voice washed over him, sending the hair on the back of his arm tingling. The skies darkened and a large patch of fog or mist rose up around one of the large, spire-like towers. Harry watched grimly as a gigantic mark of an eerie green serpent coiling around a leering skull formed in the sky. Harry could feel the very sight of the mark attempting to sap his morale, to prey on any mental weakness he might have, but resisted it completely. He was more concerned with the incantation.

He knew that voice. He knew it quite well.

"Voldemort, eh?" Harry murmured, rubbing his chin and staring up at the castle.

His eyes were shadowed underneath his fringe. One part of him filled with excitement, anticipation even, at the thought of combating Voldemort. The other part of him remembered that the man was still immortal, that there were still at least two Horcruxes left. Harry didn't

know how they would translate into Voldemort's combat effectiveness but he knew from experience that trying to kill somebody who was immortal was a real bitch.

'Harry! Look!'

Harry's eyes shot up at Meciél's prodding and shock flittered through his system, his mouth opening in surprise. Something had just been thrown from the Astronomy Tower, something small. Harry didn't need his enhanced vision in order to be able to tell what that object was and he swore, withdrawing his wand and aiming it carefully.

"Arresto Momentum!" He barked. His wand buckled in his hand as his spell caught up with the falling object. Harry twirled his wand and the falling object began to slow down. Harry raced up to meet as it slowly lowered to rest on the ground. He cringed as he knelt down next to it.

The 'it' had turned out to be a she. It was a small girl, a first or second year, Harry guessed. She was limp and unmoving and Harry frowned, carefully checking the girl's vital signs. When his hand touched the side of neck, he paused. There were slight contusions around her throat and Harry carefully ran his hands around the back of her head.

A broken neck.

What a nasty way for the girl to go, even if Harry hadn't personally known her.

'You did,' Meciél interjected quietly and Harry's vision was suddenly assaulted by a flash of visions.

Diagon Alley and Hogwarts whizzed past his eyes, the small brunette girl with sparkling dark eyes and an infectious smile... a little girl besotted by him who he had brushed aside. Harry had almost hoped that 'fans' would grow up one day and still be interested in him. This girl- Laura Madley, her name had been- would not be growing up at all. Harry was quite surprised to find that he was upset by the fact.

When had he become such a softy?

‘You did promise Dumbledore that you would look after the students of Hogwarts if you were able to,’ Meciél murmured. ‘There is a way to save her, you know. If you recall, you have something in your coat pocket...’

Harry stilled. Comprehension dawned on his face and he reached into his pocket. His fingers fumbled around until they found something small, hard and round. Carefully, Harry pulled out the only other blackened Denarius in his possession and eyed it critically. When he had given the Knights of the Cross the coins he had pillaged from the corpses of his enemies, he had hesitated when he had reached Verrine. Verrine had been a bitch and Harry really hadn’t liked her much at all, but she had been his servant and she had served him well- even going to death on his orders. Really, she deserved better than disappearing under a reclusive monastery for the next few hundred years. In the end, Harry had pocketed the coin and resolved to do something about it later.

That later was apparently now.

“She’s hasn’t been dead for long,” Harry muttered thoughtfully as he crouched beside Laura’s cooling body. His pants were stained with mud and his feet were wet. “It could happen.”

Still, Harry hesitated. Then, his head jerked up and he had to shield his eyes as the top of the tower in which Laura had fallen off was simply vaporised in a nova of magic. The ground shuddered and the castle seemed to shrink in on itself, as if something deep and primitive within it was screaming out in pain. Harry’s eyes were wide as he stared up at the fading explosion. Even from all the way on the ground, he could feel Dumbledore’s magic, potent, controlled yet filled with such fury...

Without much thought, Harry shoved Verrine’s coin in Laura’s mouth and stood up. He dusted himself up and gazed down at the dead girl. It would take some time for Verrine to fix that- her regeneration powers were nothing when compared to those of a Denarian Lord. It would take her several hours before the girl’s body was even capable of moving again.

"I know you can hear me," Harry said conversationally. "So I'll tell you this right know- you're going to fix that girl's neck and then you're going to play nice. If Dumbledore finds out that I gave the body of one of his students to my minions and said minion didn't even have the courtesy of letting the girl keep her free will, well, he'll be pissed with me. If Dumbledore gets pissed with me, he'll shout at me. If he shouts at me, I'll get pissed with you. If I get pissed with you, I'm going to shout at you- with fire. Then, I'm going to reach down that girl's throat, yank you out and throw you in the deepest parts of the ocean."

The girl didn't move at all but Harry could see that several of the bruises that had been forming on her throat were slowly, millimetre by millimetre, disappearing. He smirked, tipped his head at the girl's body and then sprinted away, up the castle path and towards the Entrance Hall doors. He didn't see Laura's eyes briefly snap open and didn't hear the girl let out a startling sob of panic as her back arched off the ground. Something dark flickered behind her eyes and then she fell back down to the ground and did not move again.

Amanda ran through the empty, darkened hallways of Hogwarts, her heart pounding in her chest. The torches hanging off the walls were flickering weakly and the few portraits she had passed had either been empty frames or frantic with panic. Just moments ago, a great flash of light had blasted through the hallway and Amanda had cried out in pain, covering her eyes with one hand. Amanda didn't know what the light had been from but it couldn't have possibly been a good thing.

The only thing that continued to give her reassurance was the flickering silver blade that was strapped to her back. It had quickly become a familiar weight, steady and unyielding. Its silver glow seeped over her entire body, washing away her fears and doubts and urging her to continue on. A sense of purpose and determination had filled her and she was not going anywhere until she had seen it through.

Shit. No wonder Harry had always gotten annoyed with the thing.

Amanda sighed to herself and rounded a corner. Something moved in front of her and Amanda paused, her face twisting up in surprise.

There was a cry and a loud bang and Amanda felt herself moving backwards, pivoting on her back foot as a bolt of crimson light shot at her. It slammed into the silver sword on her back and disappeared as the holy blade let out flashed with a bright silver flame. Amanda came out of her twist with her wand up, a not-so-nice incantation on her lips and fire in her eyes.

Professor McGonagall looked shocked.

“Professor!” Amanda spluttered, immediately lowering her wand.

McGonagall looked furious as she stalked over, her lips pursed together and her face white with anger. “You silly girl!” she said with far more anger than Amanda had ever seen from her. “Why are you not in your Common Room?”

“I...well...there was...” Suddenly, Amanda felt like squirming under McGonagall furious gaze. “The sword,” she tried to explain weakly.

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth to speak again when loud, running footsteps echoed down the corridor. She jerked her head up and none-too-gently pushed Amanda back the way she had come. Amanda only then realised that Professor McGonagall’s robes were singed and torn.

“Go!” McGonagall barked, and her wand was shaking in her hand. “I’ll hold them off! Run away! Find somewhere safe!”

Amanda swallowed nervously and took a step back. Her arm instinctively went up and her fingers glanced across the cool metal of the sword on her back. A single touch was all it took for the silver light to become brighter, illuminating the passageway around her and strengthening her resolve.

“No,” Amanda refused and stood tall and proud as McGonagall gaped at her.

A mad cackle echoed down the hallway and Amanda flinched as she recognised the laughter as something she only heard in her nightmares right now. She gripped the sword on her back and

stepped forward as two cloaked and masked Death Eaters burst into view. Leading them was Bellatrix Lestrange, her hair frizzled and a mess and her face dancing with maniac delight. Her violet eyes raked across McGonagall and she sneered, but it faded when she spotted Amanda and a truly wicked smile lit up her face.

“Oh, no!” she gasped theatrically. “The icky baby girlie has a big, sharp swordie!”

Professor McGonagall moved into action and her wand flick and swished. Three of the giant suits of armour lining the walls sprang to life and charged at the Death Eaters, while Amanda settled on the most appropriate response to Bellatrix’s taunt and raised her wand.

“Effodio!”

The tower beneath his feet groaned in protest and shuddered as Dumbledore’s Word was summoned into existence in the form of a gigantic white-hot shockwave of energy. The roof was torn apart and the walls that separated classrooms and hallways were ground away by the terrible power of the spell. Albus was panting, his head aching and his throat hoarse as he stared into the misty smoke where Voldemort had been standing. Sparks crackled through the air, random bolts of magic colliding in small, sonic booms and dispersing just as quickly. Albus steeled himself and was not surprised when Lord Voldemort appeared from the dust and smoke looking unharmed, if not just a little shaken.

“Impressive,” Voldemort admitted, his pale-white skin coated with a fine layer of grinded stone. “That was an impressive display of magic- just as impressive as the counter-spell that I somehow found myself performing. What intriguing powers.”

The wand in his hand was glowing with a deep black light and Albus could feel the sheer power emanating from his former wand. He shook his head sadly, both dreading and pitying Lord Voldemort for accepting the Elder Wand without seeing what it really was. This was

offset by his incredible fury towards the Dark Lord and Albus found that his determination and anger had not yet abated.

That was good. This was not over just quite yet.

"You are a fool, Voldemort," Albus said evenly, circling his opponent in the new widened floor. The roof and walls had all been torn apart by that last side, leaving both Albus and Voldemort standing on top of a relatively flat slab of stone high up in the sky. "The Elder Wand will consume you, just as it has consumed those who have accepted it in the past."

"I am no mere wizard," Voldemort countered, his wand held up in front of his face and the tip glowing with a menacing light. "I will be the master, not it."

"Perhaps you might have," Albus murmured quietly. His anger formed around him in a palpable aura of danger and a wind howled across the broken remains of the Astronomy Tower. "But you will not survive tonight, Tom. Your wand alone will not allow you to triumph over me. In terms of skill, I'm afraid that you are still very far behind me."

"We shall see," Voldemort hissed angrily. He raised his wand- there was a gigantic flash of crimson light. At the same time, Albus swished the stolen wand in his hand and dogs made of stone rose from the ground, running forward and leaping at the spell.

The stone dogs and the spell collided, the crimson light drilling through the transfigured creations and ripping them into a very fine dust. Almost immediately afterwards, Albus spun around and flicked his wand. A streak of light so intense that it made the Headmaster shield his eyes zoomed forward and a loud shriek rose through the air. The curse shot past the lingering remains of the stone dogs and Voldemort's curse but was batted away with a flourish of Voldemort's new wand. Black flames coated Voldemort's hand and he grinned maliciously.

"Really, Albus?" he hissed softly. "Was your power really limited to this wand alone? Have I misjudged you all these years? Was I wrong to fear you?"

Albus said nothing and did not respond to Voldemort's taunts. He swished his wand and his magic, as familiar to him as the back of the hand, leaped to obey his command. Pieces of debris shifted and heavy chains of rusted iron and spiked links circled around Voldemort. Voldemort struggled only briefly before he dispelled the charm, ducking his head out of the way from a spell that would have taken it off. He raised his wand, black fire coated his hand, and Albus was forced backwards as the two began a frantic pace of curse and counter curse.

Voldemort was unstoppable, his crimson eyes flashing with his unnatural magic as he assaulted Dumbledore without respite. Curse after curse collided in spectacular showers of sparks and noisy pops, shields flickered as they deflected and repelled spells and their wands were a constant never-ending blur. Truly, the two were both masters of their own magic. Albus was being forced back, seemingly unable to cope with the constant assault. He took a step back, and then another and then another. Voldemort pressed on his advantage, sneering down at the Headmaster.

Then, all at once, the tables seemed to turn. As Voldemort took a step closer to Dumbledore, the twisted remains of stone and classroom materials around him sprang to life, becoming a pride of lions that pounced on the seemingly frail Dark Lord with roars of anger. Voldemort caught on with his free hand and snapped its neck with contemptuous ease but the rest piled up on him. As Voldemort turned his attention on them, a cursed purple light emanating from the Death Stick, Albus struck. His wand buzzing in his hand, the grand sorcerer brandished it over his head and conjured forth a needle of fire so intense that it singed his overly-large beard. It rushed forward with a dreadful howl that rang through the tower.

The transfigured lions exploded into flames and Voldemort let out a terrible screech of pain as the fire ripped into the tumbled pile. The darkness gathered around him and Voldemort leapt from the burning remains of the transfigured beasts, anxiously putting out the fire on his now-sooty robes. He glared at Dumbledore, his fury evident.

"Using dirty tricks now, are we?" He asked menacingly.

“For your own sake, I do hope that you can do better than that,” Albus replied calmly. “I may have to enroll you back at Hogwarts if your performance does not improve.”

Voldemort sneered. “Putesco!” he hissed dangerously, a spell of murky-brown blasting at Albus. Albus wrinkled his nose at the pungent spell of the Rotting Curse but deflected it gracefully with a long swish of his wand. It flew to the side and disappeared out into the darkness of the night.

Albus pointed his wand at Voldemort and grunted in exertion as he cast his spell. The Headmaster was holding out his other hand behind him as if he was gripping something extremely heavy. Voldemort tensed and his wand flew around him, a number of quick defensive spells springing up around him in small screens of blue and white light. Both wizards were well aware that such spells were only intended to delay the spell for that precious split-second it would take for either one of them to prepare a counter-spell. To Voldemort’s delight, however, nothing seemed to have happened.

“Pathetic,” the Dark Lord scorned disdainfully.

But there was still a degree of caution in his movements as he raised his wand, testing Dumbledore’s defences as the old man remained still, his hand still outstretched behind him. Albus’s eyes flickered to the side and all it took was a mere glance at one of the tattered remains of the desk for it to soaring before him, crashing into the curse and exploding in a loud blast of fire. The curse, not totally nullified, was knocked off course, driving into the ground and causing slightly unstable tower to shudder.

Voldemort frowned and raised his wand again, but suddenly he paused as a sound filled the air. It was faint at first but it grew louder and louder- the deafening roar of the raging tide. Albus grunted and his hand lifted up into the air. From behind came a gigantic column of spinning water which lifted up over the Headmaster’s head. Voldemort looked shocked as Albus brought his hand down and directed the massive column of water to crash into Voldemort. The

last Albus saw of Voldemort before the water overtook him was his gleaming red eyes as he held up his wand.

It was as if a bomb had gone off. The Astronomy Tower rocked as the immense pressure of the miniature tidal wave crashed upon a single lone individual. Pieces of debris and large chunks of the already badly damaged floor were washed aside in an instant. Albus was safe as the water leapt over his head, sweeping the entire astronomy tower clean and sending it all spiralling off the edges. To an observer, Hogwarts largest tower looked more like a gigantic waterfall as tons of water reached the edge and plummeted down- taking whatever was unlucky enough to be caught in its fury along with it.

The water was no longer rising up behind him and the rest of it was quickly pouring off the sides as Albus lowered his wand and stared at the devastation grimly. Voldemort was nowhere to be seen and that unsettled the Headmaster more than he would care to admit. Unless the Dark Lord had become entirely reliant on his newfound wand, Dumbledore would have expected him to have countered, or at least protected himself from, his attack. Carefully, Albus swept his gaze over the soggy ruins of the tower and reached out with senses, but he could not feel a hint of Lord Voldemort. A cool breeze wept over the suddenly silent tower while the Dark Mark continued to glow menacingly above him.

Perhaps Voldemort had been washed away. Such a fall, as great as it was, would not have killed him, but it would give Albus time to prepare himself and summon the Order. He could not defeat Lord Voldemort, he never could. That privilege alone was and always had been Harry's to claim. There was- Albus's thought patterns were interrupted when he tried to take a step forward and found his movement to be sluggish. There was a slight rustle behind him and Albus snapped his head back as far as it could go.

Rising from his shadow on the ground was Lord Voldemort, crimson eyes glimmering dangerously and the Elder Wand pointed at him. "Avada Kedavra!"

Green enveloped his vision and Dumbledore felt his heart miss a beat. It was too close, it was over. His wand rose, his eyes slowly parted

with shock, his mouth opened in horror- and then there was a gigantic burst of flame and a song of pure passion filled the tower. Something hard and fast slammed into Albus and he grunted in pain as he was pushed away with great force, his chest letting out an uncomfortable series of cracks. The curse missed him by scant centimetres and Dumbledore groaned as he bounced across the stone floor, hurt but alive.

Fawkes soared through the air, her beady black eyes levelled at Voldemort defiantly. Something long and bloodied fell from her talons and collapsed to the ground in front of him and his face belied his shock. "Nagini!" Voldemort whispered with something like sorrow.

Albus smiled as he pulled himself up off the ground. "Clever girl," he murmured. Perhaps the wily old phoenix had been listening in on more of his conversations than he had thought. That was Voldemort's fifth Horcrux and if Harry had been successful, then only one remained.

Voldemort raised his head and glared at Fawkes with unmatched rage. "You stupid little beast!" he hissed quietly. "You will regret that for the short time you have left to live!"

Black light cocooned over the startled phoenix, holding it in place. The bird opened its mouth, a fiery corona appearing over it, and Albus let out a startled shout of panic. Before the Summer Fae could disappear in a flash of fire, she was impaled by numerous long, sharp iron rods. The phoenix let out a strangled choking noise and its fire dissipated as it tumbled to the ground, its power bound in place by the iron that ran through its veins.

Voldemort pointed his wand at the fallen Phoenix- Albus surged forward and batted the wand away with his own and a ripple blasted through the remains of the Astronomy Tower. Albus's stolen wand was glowing as he used all of his physical and magical might to press against Voldemort's wand, keeping it pointed away from the wounded phoenix. Albus stared into the eyes of his opponent and concentrated. His beard, no longer tucked away in his belt, rose up and became a series of long, thin knives held up by the long hairs on his chin. They lunged at Voldemort but they became a snake, which coiled around

Voldemort's shoulders and- still attached to Dumbledore's beard- lunged for him with a deadly hiss. Albus broke away and a quick flick of his wand negated the hasty self-transfiguration. A quick swish of his wand and Fawkes was propelled over the ledge of the tower, falling from dangerous heights but away from the true threat on her life.

"It appears that Maeve was able to teach you something," Albus said tightly. "Your partnership did prove useful in the end, it seems."

"Maeve?" Voldemort cocked his head, sounding genuinely puzzled. "Winter Lady Maeve? Have you truly gone senile, Dumbledore? There is no more connection between the Winter Lady and myself than there is to me and you."

Albus said nothing but confusion warred within him. If Lord Voldemort had not been Maeve's partner in her plot to gain a foothold in the Wizarding World, then who had? Voldemort did not allow Dumbledore to think for much longer and the old man was soon duelling with him once more.

"Avada Kedavra!" Voldemort said. "Avada Kedavra! Avada Kedavra!"

Bolts of deadly green light were hurled at him and wind roared throughout the tower. Albus rose the ground up to meet them but the empowered curses were too powerful though and they punched through the rock like a knife through butter, forcing Albus to tap himself on the head and transfigure himself. A small frog sat on the ground where a tall, elderly man once stood, and it tensed and leaped forward, soaring through the relatively small gap in between the three curses.

Albus had regained his human form before his feet had touched the ground and he took in a deep breath, preparing himself. A Word roared from his throat and the tower shook as crackles of electric-like magic ground through the rock. It leapt from puddle to puddle as if it were alive and lashed out at Voldemort, who tried to bat it away with his wand. His face slackened with surprise when the tendrils of energy latched onto the slender piece of wood and shot over his body, crackling and spluttering over his dark robes. Voldemort's serpentine

eyes turned towards Dumbledore, who had raised his arms and tilted his head towards the as if he was pleading with some great deity.

Something answered him.

Thunder boomed across the sky and lightning flashed down once, twice, three times! Voldemort was struck, the massive torrent of energy ripping over his body and blasting downwards. The tower rocked as bolts of lightning tore into the massive stones holding it up, ripping through the innards of the castle until it had reached the dungeons. The heat centred where Voldemort had been standing was so great that Albus was forced to step away, his robes beginning to blacken and burn.

Then it all disappeared and Voldemort reappeared, his wand held high and a look of faint surprise on his face. A faint, hazy patch of glowing light was surrounding his body and the Elder Wand clutched tight in his hands was trembling furiously.

“Amazing,” Voldemort whispered.

Albus only had a split-second as Voldemort whirled on him and the darkness leapt out of the shadows and rushed to do their master's bidding. A deep black fog of boiling, writhing darkness was launched at him and Albus turned around and ran. It chased after him, and Albus pointed his wand over his shoulder, conjuring a massive blast of light that ripped through the large, rolling wave of foggy blackness, slowing it down. Albus pointed at small, broken piece of glass-something that looked to have come off a mirror, and dove down towards it as the summoned darkness seemingly recovered and surrounded him. Albus spread his hands apart and dove into the mirror as the darkness surrounded him.

Voldemort was surprised when, a second later, Albus jumped out of a piece of debris and levelled his wand at his exposed back. A whispered word was all it took and suddenly an assortment of weaponry was conjured before him. Long, shining lances were propelled forward with great force as Voldemort casually turned around. The blurring lances struck Voldemort and shattered on impact, falling to the ground with a large clatter.

"The skin of a basilisk is said to be as hard as diamonds," Voldemort remarked with casual indifference.

Albus, breathing deeply, said nothing. His greater spells and magic, which possibly might have been more effective, were seemingly out of his reach. This wand, the headmaster concluded to himself privately, did not like him very much at all. Maybe Voldemort had been right. Maybe he had been dependent on a wand that obeyed his every whim of magic without delay.

"The Elder wand has been taken from you and your bird is dead," Voldemort spoke after a few moments. Albus said nothing. "Your teachers are fighting my servants and Harry Potter has fled underground. Albus Dumbledore, for the first time in our battles, you are truly alone."

Albus gazed at Voldemort and then, to the Dark Lord's annoyance, smiled gently. "Oh, Tom," he said, almost wistfully. "If only you had been able to understand that nobody is ever truly alone then we would not be here. To be remembered fondly and with affection by the ones you cherish and those who cherish you is far greater than being remembered for any grand deed."

"You really are a senile old fool." Despite his words, Voldemort did not sound hostile. "I almost find it heartbreaking that you truly believe in that sort of ridiculous sentimentality. However, I have discarded such useless trivialities long ago. There is no such thing as good or evil, there is only power and those too weak to seek it. You, Dumbledore, for all of your power are still weak. That is why we are here, because you could not shed your emotions and think logically!"

"If you had been in my place, Tom, then I have no doubt that you would have sacrificed those children without hesitation before you would dare to sacrifice your power," Dumbledore spoke solemnly. "It was my choice that shows that I am a greater wizard than you. Perhaps you are more powerful, but I am and will always be far greater than you."

"The greater wizard, who tires and weakens from this battle," Voldemort retorted quietly. "The greater wizard, who will die here tonight by my wand, who will fade from obscurity when I rule over a cleansed and proper Wizarding World, immortal and all-powerful. Yes, Dumbledore, I can truly see how you are so 'great'."

"No, you can't." Albus seemed to take his sarcasm seriously. "And, for that, I pity you. I pity you, Voldemort- Tom. I really do." The tower shuddered and Voldemort disappeared under a whirling current of flame as Albus whipped up a frenzied firestorm beneath the dark lord's feet, his eyes hard and unforgiving. "But, whilst I might pity you, I also despise you. For that, I will not be lenient."

The fire disappeared and Voldemort re-emerged. His eyes were rolled up back in his head and his pale-white skin was blackened and scorched. Slowly, it began to crumble away into nothingness revealing that there was nothing underneath the layer of skin- as if Voldemort had simply shed it off and disappeared Albus gripped his wand and his eyes widened as Voldemort leapt from the shadows, his wand raised above his head and his eyes glowing.

"Argentum Telum!" Voldemort shouted. His wand glowed with a sick purple light.

The spell, normally a small silvery projectile shaped rather like an arrow, was boosted by the power of the Elder wand and Albus's vision was filled with intense silver light. He flicked his wand, desperately trying to counter the spell with one of his own. A streak of crimson light blasted forward so powerful that it the puddles of water it crossed over boiled beneath it. The two spells collided, crimson meeting silver and Albus didn't even get the chance to blink before his spell was torn asunder and the silver arrow drove into his chest. He coughed, pain radiating throughout his entire body and an unbearable burning sensation coming from his lungs, and staggered back, his vision blurring. White hairs drifted to the ground as the lower half of his beard, severed by the spell, fell away. The spell, which would have killed almost anybody else, had broken apart on the enchantments on his robes and delivered him a grievous wound.

It was not fatal- but it was a clear sign of which direction this duel was heading. He was not as strong or durable as Voldemort and could not shrug off the damage that the Dark Lord and Harry Potter were both able to do with ease.

“Tonight is the night that Albus Dumbledore will fall,” Lord Voldemort declared, peering over his wand with gleaming eyes. Albus staggered up, forced himself to grip his wand even tighter. “Tonight, the reign of Albus Dumbledore will end and the reign of Lord Voldemort will begin!”

Albus feared he just might be right.

A/N: Hey guys. I've had a few- well, no, a lot of people asking me to not kill of Dumbledore. Read on below and you'll see his final moments in the Voldemort duel. Like I said, I want to get this done by Christmas. I've got Ch33 almost done and only another 3 chapters after it, so it looks like I will. Read and enjoy.

The professors of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry were at war and their classrooms had become the battlefields. In the event of any emergency, the sole concern for any professor was the safety of their students. Luckily, Albus Dumbledore had foreseen a time when the students might be in danger and had spirited them off to safety. This allowed the talented professors, often masters of their fields, to concentrate their efforts on meeting the threat to Hogwarts without worrying about any unwanted casualties or bystander interference.

There were few exceptions. Harry Potter was one, his brief stint as a student showing that he was more than capable of looking after himself. Amanda Carpenter was quickly proving that she was another. Amanda's fight had taken her far away from the safety of Professor McGonagall and the other Professors and she now stood in the third floor corridor, alone but not defenceless.

"Avada Kedavra!" Bellatrix Lestrange howled, brandishing her wand frantically and casting deadly coil after coil of green streaks of light. Her eyes, sunken and shadowed, were alight with madness and her robes were swirling around her in an unconscious display of her anger.

Amanda was panting, her muscles weary and her mouth dry, yet she still managed to bring the glowing silver sword in her hands up and the 'unstoppable' killing curse simply veered away, as if the very magic within the curse was hesitant to approach the holy blade. The killing curses struck the walls and floor, great chunks of stone exploding all around the blonde-haired Knight as she was forced back and back by the older, more powerful and experienced Death Eater.

“You little bitch!” Bellatrix howled, clutching at her face angrily. “Why won’t you just die!?”

“Effodio!” Amanda responded with a quick flick of her wand. There was a loud bang that echoed in the corridors- a silver flash of light blasted forward, but Bellatrix was quick, quicker than Amanda, and she parried that curse almost effortlessly.

A nearby portrait shrieked and fled from its frame as the silver flash struck it, exploding quite loudly. Amanda backpedalled as Bellatrix ripped into her shabby defences, her wand whizzing forward madly. The air became filled with streaks of light and Bellatrix’s black robes whirled and flapped around her. A dark golden curse sizzle past Amanda and grazed her arm, and she let out a cry as a burning stabbing sensation shot up and down the limb. She randomly swung the sword out in front of her even as her left arm began to lose all sensation, batting curse after curse away from her.

“Plecto!” Amanda hollered, waving her wand out as best she could with her left hand. A loud whip-like crack filled the air and Bellatrix sneered, parrying the curse away with ease.

“Playtime’s over, little girl,” she gloated. “Schoolyard hexes and jinxes won’t hurt somebody like me! You’re going to need real power to make a difference in this fight!”

“You’re right,” Amanda panted, leaning back against the wall and glaring at the Death Eater. A dark encompassing emotion was swirling in the pit of her stomach. “With an ugly face like yours, schoolyard jinxes would only make you look better!”

Bellatrix howled with laughter and Amanda barely had time to lift the sword as a blinding light filled her vision. Her head spun and her eardrums exploded in agony as a great force sent her hurling down the hallway, spinning and twisting through the air wildly. She tumbled along the ground, her wand slipping from her grasp, and came to a stop at the foot of a staircase at the other end of the corridor. She groaned, her head pounding madly as her vision returned to her. Everything was spinning, and Amanda clutched her head as she tried to stand up. The world spun and she gasped, falling to her knees.

She was distantly aware of hearing a loud clatter as the Sword of the Cross fell onto the ground behind her.

“Little dollies shouldn’t try to trash-talk,” Bellatrix advised sagely, nodding her frizzled head. “Yes, yes, this is how it’s meant to be. Mudbloods on their knees before their superiors- what better sight is there?”

“Obviously not your face,” Amanda managed to get out snidely. She snickered as Bellatrix hissed in protest, all the while watching the Death Eaters wand with great care. Even in her dazed state, she had an idea...

“Avada Kedavra!”

Bellatrix’s wand glowed and a green streak of light blasted forward towards the helpless Gryffindor. Amanda ducked and threw herself to the ground, the curse soaring over her head. It struck the sword laying on the staircase and silver fire flared- the curse rebounded and Bellatrix shrieked as she threw herself aside. The curse exploded on one of the nearby suits of armour, which toppled over with a loud groan. Something was launched through the air and Amanda reflexively caught the thin stick of wood that dropped neatly in her hand.

There was a pause.

“Huh,” Amanda muttered. “Lucky.”

Then, the staircase she was leaned against shuddered and Bellatrix shrieked in anger as the staircase began moving. Amanda scrambled up the stairs, her wand held in her left hand- which was completely numb at that point.

“Effodio!” Amanda shouted, brandishing her wand. “Effodio!”

Bellatrix parried the curses and responded with a deadly bolt of azure light, which soared over Amanda’s head as the staircase began to descend. Bits of wood and stone fell past Amanda as the curse drove a large hole into the wall. The newest Knight of the Cross heaved her

sword over her shoulders and cast her eyes up as the Bellatrix disappeared from sight. The moment the Death Eater was gone, Amanda doubled over as all of the pain of her bruises and injuries seemed to rush at her at once. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to block the tears that threatened to leave them as she chastised herself over and over again.

“Stupid Amanda, stupid, stupid, stupid,” Amanda growled at herself. It had all seemed so clear before- the sword had taken her worry and fear and cast it aside. She had faced Bellatrix once before- what had she expected from the more powerful, more skilful witch?

The sword quivered on her shoulders and Amanda relaxed as silver flame danced across her skin. It seemed to flow into her, a calm, inner peace soothing her hurt and fear. Amanda took in a deep breath and removed her head from her hands. She was ready.

A killing curse soared down and hit her.

It struck Amanda on the shoulders and was repelled by the Sword of the Cross. Amanda staggered from the blow and her eyes went wide as she lost footing, tumbling from the edge of the staircase. She let out a scream and closed her eyes for the inevitable rushing wind and untimely demise. It never came as she landed on hard ground an instant later and she opened her eyes. The staircase must have been just above one of other floors when she had been thrown overboard. She sighed, but her breath froze in her throat.

Bellatrix Lestrange was above her, riding another moving staircase with a sinister grin plastered over her pale, haggard face. She flicked her wand and Amanda rolled over as a crackling bolt of lightning-like magic raked over where she had been a second beforehand, scorching and cracking the floor. Amanda stood up as the smell of ozone filled her nostrils and hefted the sword up. Silver flame burned along the blade as Amanda readied herself, her fear and pain gone.

With a shrieked incantation, Bellatrix hurled herself off the edge of the staircase and plummeted to the ground. Amanda sent a roaring wind to hurl her away but Bellatrix pushed through it and a great globe of fire roared to life. Amanda staggered backwards as Bellatrix used the

fire to slow her descent, somehow immune to the deadly flames, and the dangerous witch landed in front of Amanda.

“Sopordormius!” Amanda chanted.

White, smoky mist billowed out of the tip of her wand and Bellatrix’s location was quickly covered in rolling waves of enchanted mist. Amanda was careful not to breathe any of it in herself as she took a few steps backwards, her wand trained in the mist for any sign of movement. A glimmer of light sparkled in front of her, and Amanda levelled her wand at it.

“Extundo!” She cried out.

A glowing orb of darkness propelled forward and struck something. There was a loud crash and high-pitched screeching noise hit Amanda’s ears. Something was torn apart by her curse and Amanda ducked as a piece of metal almost took her head off and a suit of mangled, torn apart armour collapsed on the ground in front of her.

“Avada Kedavra!”

Amanda batted away the Killing Curse with a hefty swipe of her sword. Bellatrix came hurling out of the mist as it began to dissipate. Her hair sharpened and became as sleek as polished scales and a dozen transfigured cobras hissed menacingly as they snapped at Amanda threateningly.

“Caecus!” Amanda managed to cast and then ducked out of the way of the hypnotic weaving of the serpents. Strands of violent light flew from her wand and wrapped around the eyes of the snakes. The reptiles swayed and suddenly became panicked as they were deprived all of their senses and Bellatrix was forced to undo her transfiguration, her hair being restored back to its natural state.

With a mad howl, Bellatrix leapt at Amanda and the two began a frantic duel as they fought through the hallway, alone and undisturbed. The Death Eater was insane, her purple eyes bulging with emotion and her mouth open in a perpetual snarl as she cast powerful spell after spell at Amanda, who could barely block them despite the

abilities of the Sword of the Cross. Bellatrix had been a powerful dark witch before Amanda had even been born and it showed.

Amanda was not discouraged and soon her breathing fell into a pattern. Breath in- parry, parry, deflect, dodge, duck, parry, breath out- duck, sidestep, dodge, parry, shield, curse, breath in. Her actions were automatic and her eyes were distant, as if she was barely aware of her surroundings. A great need was pressing on her mind and the sword was burning with silver fire on her back, almost quivering in anticipation. Without a doubt, Amanda knew that in a few moments Bellatrix was going to overextend herself, allowing Amanda her one and only chance at winning this fight.

If she didn't take this chance, she had this sinking feeling that would not get another and Bellatrix would kill her- or worse.

Bellatrix sent curse after curse at the blonde-haired Mudblood and howled in anger as the girl once again slipped past them by the barest fraction. The Death Eater had never faced an opponent who had been so lucky before! It wasn't as if the girl was a bad fighter- beneath her crude movements were glimpses of somebody who had been shown how to duel- but Bellatrix was her superior. The sword that the girl was using was naggingly familiar but Bellatrix was too lost in the fight to try to think about it.

Even Harry Potter had not infuriated her this much. That accursed boy had overwhelmed her with sheer power that made her think of her Master, he had not ducked and dodged and escaped death time and time again by the sheerest skin of his neck.

"You stupid pathetic little girl!" Bellatrix hissed, her wand clashing with the Mudblood's in a shower of silver and green sparks.

The girl stared back at her with vapid, calm eyes, not a single trace of emotion on her face. Strangely, that infuriated Bellatrix even more than the mudblood's pathetic attempts to insult her had. She growled out loud, baring her teeth as saliva dribbled down her chin and onto her robes, and lashed out at the girl with a vicious swipe of her wand. Bellatrix automatically moved her wand to where she knew the girl

would dodge, where she had dodged the last fifteen times, and began to cast another curse.

The girl did not move and Bellatrix's first curse brushed by her shoulders, sheering a length of robe and much of the skin of her shoulder off. Bellatrix's eyes widened even as the sword-wielding girl's blood splattered on her face as the girl swept her wand around and levelled it at the Death Eater's exposed chest.

"Ventungo!" The girl exclaimed and twisted her wand.

Bellatrix doubled over and howled in pain as an agonizing sensation struck her lower abdomen. It was unrelenting, twisting and tearing into her innards as if the Mudblood had taken a knife and was casually twisting the blade in and out, in and out. Silver light flashed in Bellatrix's eyes and she glanced up as blood dribbled from her lips to see the girl hefting the glowing silver blade over her head.

"You..." Bellatrix started furiously.

The girl brought the blade down upon her neck and Bellatrix's vision was filled with a terrible silver flame that swept through her mind, examining every facet of the insane witch's mind. Bellatrix felt her condemnation as the silver flame judged her unworthy and didn't even feel the biting pinch of steel as it stuck her head clear from her shoulders.

Amanda stared down at the headless corpse of Bellatrix Lestrange, the Sword of the Cross held loosely in her hands. Silver fire continued to dance along the blade, slowly vapouring the inky dark blood that covered it, while Amanda heaved in deep breaths.

Then, she promptly threw up all over Bellatrix's corpse and staggered away as nausea hit her like a sledgehammer. She turned the corner and collapsed against the wall, throwing the sword aside and taking deep breaths as she tried to hold back the bile. She knew she had killed before, that one man in the Department of Mysteries with the Fiendfyre, but it had not been like this.

Running footsteps dragged her out of her stupor and Amanda staggered up, brandishing her wand in front of her with frantic movements. Her entire body ached and her left arm was beginning to go cold and pale. She could not take on another Death Eater, not yet. The inner fire that had burned so righteously within her was gone, leaving behind a weary, almost-tearful schoolgirl in its place.

Harry Potter turned the corner and Amanda shrieked as a jet of fire swept over her head. She ducked as Harry quickly diverted the lethal flame away from her at the last moment, a somewhat sheepish grin on his face.

"Sorry," he said cheerfully and Amanda felt her heart lighten as she stared up at the face of her...whatever he was to her.

"Harry," Amanda practically sobbed with relief. "You're here."

"I am," Harry agreed and frowned. He peered over Amanda's shoulder and she couldn't help but feel proud as surprise flickered across his face. "Isn't that the psycho-bitch Death Eater?"

Amanda nodded.

He gazed at her approvingly. "Nice work," he said appreciatively.

"Thanks," Amanda said tiredly. She swayed on her feet and Harry didn't even have a chance to look surprised as she practically collapsed in his arms.

With a gentleness that she would have been ecstatic over at any other time, Harry carefully laid her back on the ground and stood back up. He hovered over her unmoving form and if Amanda didn't know better she would have to say that he was fidgeting nervously. There was no sign of any discomfort in his voice when he spoke up next.

"Oi, Amanda," Harry said lazily. "Try not to die, okay?"

It was the closest thing to concern that he was going to show her, so she made an attempt to smile at him.

“Yeah,” she agreed faintly. “Don’t you die too.”

Harry snorted. “Silly brat,” he said almost-fondly. “I’m immortal.”

Amanda wanted him to say something else, to bare her own heart at him while she still could but when she looked up Harry had already gone.

The castle floor shuddered underneath Harry’s feet, causing him to increase his pace as he sprinted up the moving staircases. The battle between Dumbledore and Voldemort above (for who else could it be?) was sending tremors throughout the tower, causing large cracks to rip down through the stone. The tower had already weathered quite a beating and it wouldn’t surprise Harry if the next spell that stressed the thousand-year-old stones caused the tower to cave in on itself- or worse, cave in on the school.

Harry was not the sentimentalist type, but he really hoped that there were no students left in the castle. For their sake, they would not want to be close when Harry arrived. Voldemort was in for an arse-kicking that was long overdue. Of all the students, only Amanda would even have a chance of surviving if the battle drew close to her- and that was only because of the incredible defensive properties of the Sword of the Cross she now wielded.

Harry couldn’t help the chuckle that escaped him as he continued to ascend the shaking tower. Amanda Carpenter, Knight of the Cross- and the killer of that rabid bitch Harry had met briefly in the Department of Mysteries.

Oh, how he had trained her well.

Meciel stirred within his mind, speaking to him even as she prepared his body for imminent combat, increasing hormones and blood production, tightening and quickening his nervous system and sending tightly-woven coils into his limbs and extremities to push them far beyond what God had ever intended.

‘The girl is amusing, yes, but take care,’ Meciél warned. ‘The Higher Powers have a way with convincing arguments that you sadly lack and even the most well trained attack dog can always turn on her owner...’

Harry brushed the warning aside as he took a running jump across a set of moving staircases and landed on the ground noisily. He stood up, his eyes ever watchful as he scanned the nearby doors. He had arrived on one of the floors and classroom doors lay on the left and right. Harry turned around and began judging the jump needed to get to one of the staircases that were moving upwards when his sensitive ears heard a slight thump from afar.

‘32 kilograms dispersed over a range of about one metre and seven centimetres,’ Meciél informed him and there was a curious note in her voice. ‘That was a human body- a child given the size.’

“Is that so?” Harry murmured. He squared his chin and narrowed his eyes. Pulling out his wand, he smiled grimly. “Let’s go see what’s going on, hmm?”

Harry stalked down the corridor like a wraith and the noises became louder and louder. With each thump, Harry quickened his pace until he was practically sprinting, his legs pumping with Hellfire. The doors whizzed by, all locked and closed...there was nothing on the left...nothing on the right...there! Straight ahead! Harry heard muffled sounds from the door at the very edge of the corridor and lowered his shoulder. Without so much as pausing, Harry slammed into the door with the force of a charging bull and ripped the wooden door off its hinges.

There was a startled yell and a series of high-pitched screams as Harry righted himself, barely even feeling the sting of his shoulder. Three cloaked and masked Death Eaters looked startled and one of them still had a wand raised to a shaking boy, his brown eyes wide open with terror. Harry’s gaze was drawn to the floor, where the unnaturally still bodies of boys and girls lay, their eyes glazed over with stark terror and their faces contorted with fear even in death...

Harry felt his blood boil.

“Avada Kedavra!” One of the Death Eaters managed to stutter.

Harry automatically sidestepped but realised too late that the target wasn't him. With a flash of light and an unearthly scream, the boy toppled over and stilled.

The Death Eater seemed to realise that he hadn't even been pointing his wand in the right direction, but his fate had already been sealed and Harry moved into action. He leapt forward, his wand blurring, and one of the Death Eaters screamed in agony as his skin began steaming, the very blood in his veins becoming liquid flame. He fell to the ground as a skeletal wing rose up from behind Harry's back and tore through the arm of the Death Eater that had just used the Killing Curse. The man screamed in agony as Harry turned around and disposed of the third and final Death Eater with a spell that tore the man's head off.

Harry turned back to the crippled Death Eater, who was hunched over clutching the stump that used to be his wand arm. Without a single shred of mercy, Harry reached down and grabbed the man by the throat. He lifted the Death Eater up until the man gurgled and choked around his clenched hand and leant forward, his green eyes glinting dangerously. The man's eyes met Harry's malicious gaze and the Denarian Lord wrinkled his nose when he smelt the man urinate himself.

“Now, I know I'm not a nice person but this...” Harry gestured to the dead students, second years at the very least, “This is depraved even for me. I'm going to really fuck you up for this.”

The man tried to gurgle out something from behind Harry's hand. Harry didn't loosen his grip as he stared deep into the man's eyes. “Legillimens.”

With the power of Meciél behind him, Harry found that he was not a very good legillimens. Even with Meciél's help, he had not been able to stop projecting a tiny slither of the ancient angel's presence forward and completely destroying his targets mind. This time, however, that was his intention. Meciél's fury roared forward and the

man let out a horrible scream as his one good hand came up to his head. He rocked back and forth in Harry's hand as Meciél tore into his psyche with a terrible savagery, reducing him into a gibbering, blubbing mess.

Harry let the man go and he fell to the ground, shaking and screaming in agony. Harry was entertained for a few moments before he caught sight of the rest of the remaining students- ten or twelve at the very best- and sighed.

"Sorry," he shouted over the screams. He frowned, and then delivered a harsh kick to the man's throat. Something snapped and while it wasn't hard enough to kill the man his screams were rendered into a series of muffled groans. "He'll be screaming for the rest of his life."

The students were shaking and even Harry couldn't help the pang of sympathy that ran through him. He waved his wand and the desks and chairs rose up around him, slamming into the ground and forming a wall between the dead bodies of both children and Death Eaters, keeping them out of sight of the students that were still alive.

"Where's your Professor?" Harry asked the nearest one, a petite girl with a vague aristocratic air about her. She didn't respond and only managed to tear gaze away from the wall of chairs and tables after Harry nudged her.

"Dead!" the girl whispered. "It...was..."

She seemed inconsolable.

"You-Know-Who!" One of the other students whimpered. "He was..."

Harry's face twisted into a scowl. That was the final confirmation that he needed about Voldemort's presence. Harry opened his mouth to instruct them when he paused, frowning. What could he do with them? He couldn't send them away with a portkey as the wards around the school were still active (Harry wondered how the hell the Death Eaters had gotten inside in the first place). He could escort them downstairs and take them somewhere relatively safer but that

would take up valuable time and Harry had the most pressing feeling that he needed to arrive at the top of the tower as soon as possible.

“Stay here,” he decided after a few moments and glanced out the window. “Don’t leave this room. I’m going to leave and send someone here for you soon, okay?”

After a few hesitant nods, Harry carefully made his way to entrance of the classroom and closed the door. He ran his wand over the frame, enchanting and charming the very wood with a set of spells that he had gotten from the tome of magic Dumbledore had given him all those months ago. He almost pitied any Death Eaters who tried to open the door- but then he thought of little unmoving bodies and that pity was replaced with grimness.

He would go to the tower. He would relieve Dumbledore and send the old man down here to pick up the students. Then, he would turn his wand and every ounce of his considerable power upon Lord Voldemort and turn that inhuman piece of shit into very little tiny pieces.

Albus Dumbledore panted as he parried another spell. The coil of dark magic strained against his stolen wand for a moment, its eerie purple glow lighting up Albus’s face and highlighting the sunken skin stretched across his face, the sweat beading down his forehead and his oh so weary eyes. With a great deal of effort, Albus managed to shrug off the curse and sent it careening into the night sky.

“Oh dear,” Voldemort murmured insincerely. “You seem to be getting a little tired, Albus. Would you like me to wait and allow an old man to have his afternoon snooze?”

Albus did not rise to the bait. In truth, he felt as opening his mouth would suck up the last of his dredges of energy and render him utterly useless. His scorched and bloodied robes, once made of fine silver and purple silk, were held together by tatters and his once-long beard had been shaven in half by a spell that he had only been able to deflect.

Lord Voldemort prowled around him, his crimson eyes gleaming in the darkness as he cloak fluttered around him. He idly spun his wand through his fingers, occasionally sending a spell at Albus and battering the man's already weakened defences. His slit-like nostrils were flared with pleasure and the Dark Lord radiated a sense of smug satisfaction and joy. He was clearly taking a great deal of pleasure in this.

Albus would let him. If Voldemort's flair for dramatics kept him alive for a little bit longer then so be it. If Voldemort wished to toy with him as a Seventh Year would toy with a First Year (and with the range of magic Albus could use with his stolen wand, it certainly felt like that) then the Dark Lord was more than welcome too.

He was not finished yet. There was one more thing he had to do, to close the final chapter on Lord Voldemort and discover the last, secret location of the final Horcrux. He needed to wait, needed to bide his time until it was most prudent to do so. It would do the world no good if Albus was able to find out where the last Horcrux was hidden and was then killed before he had a chance to share that information with anybody.

Albus grunted and pushed himself up, using the crumbled remains of the wall behind him as a brace. The once beautiful Astronomy Tower was no more and all that remained was a plateau on a peak of rubble surrounded by the night sky.

His school, his beautiful, beautiful school. One thousand years of history and magic and learning was being destroyed before his very eyes and he could do nothing to stop it.

"Avada Kedavra!" Voldemort cast with great relish.

Albus flicked his wand. A large slab of rock rose from the ground, creating a barrier between him and the curse. The Killing Curse drove home on the stone wall and it exploded in a flash of green light. Albus barely had time to dive out of the way as the killing curse continued on undeterred and soared over his shoulder.

“Your magic is weak, your body is old and your mind is feeble,” Voldemort taunted. He shook his head, looking disappointed. “Albus Dumbledore. A wizard of your stature deserves a much nobler death than this. Sadly, I cannot offer you one.”

Albus realised with a start that Voldemort was done and he took in a deep breath, summoning the very last bit of his physical and magical energy. There was no more time. He had to do it now. As Voldemort raised his wand, Albus let out that breath and moved. Voldemort started at the movement and that was enough for Albus to act. He leapt forward with a sudden burst of speed that belied his beaten and battered state and entered Voldemort’s personal space. Two gnarled hands reached up and clasped the side of Voldemort’s head. Before Voldemort could utter a single word, Albus concentrated and summoned his final Word of the World for the duel.

The word tore from his mouth with the force of a cannon and Voldemort rocked back as if he had been struck as blood trickled from his ears. Oblivious to his own pain, Albus met the sudden panicked eyes of Voldemort and entered the mind of his former student with ease. His mental probe soared past the stunned defences of Lord Voldemort’s mind, the Dark Lord’s mental power had simply been shattered under the force of the Word allowing Albus time to find what he was seeking for.

He skimmed past memory after memory, honing in on those that were relevant. Horcrux...Horcrux...Horcrux... Albus’s mantra became Lord Voldemort’s and his memories adjusted accordingly. In sudden flashes, Albus saw it all, saw the unspeakable things Voldemort had done to keep himself from the mortal coil, saw the brutal murders, the savagery of the kills, the obvious relish of the Dark Lord as he bathed in the blood of infants as the rituals got worse and worse...Voldemort had taken the Horcrux concept to a whole new level of depravity when he had applied ‘seven’ to it.

Albus brushed by those even as they sickened him and found himself staring at a diary. Then, it was a cup and then a snake and then a locket and then a ring and then...a helm?. The memories moved forward and Albus saw himself hiding them, one in a cave, two entrusted to loyal Death Eaters, one hidden in a shack, one always

by his side and one...hidden in the very place where nobody would look for it.

With a start, Albus discovered what and where the last Horcrux of Lord Voldemort was hidden.

Then, with a sudden lurch, Albus was propelled out of the Dark Lord's mind and his vision blurred. The very force of the ejection sent his body soaring and he hit the ground with a painful thump, his half-moon glasses cracked and skewered on his nose.

Lord Voldemort loomed above him, his fury audible on his face. "You miserable old bastard!" He hissed even as one hand clutched his head. "Do you know what you've done?"

Albus could hardly find himself to care.

Voldemort levelled his wand. "I cannot allow you to leave here with that information in your head," he murmured. "No, I am through with our games, Albus Dumbledore. Avada Kedavra!"

Albus's vision was ensnared with a great flash of green light and his mouth opened with slack horror as a coil of deadly green magic glowed at the tip of the Elder Wand. Then, the wand was suddenly jerked up and somebody was standing between him and Voldemort as the Killing Curse soared over his head and into the heavens.

"Now that was timing," Harry Potter crowed, his trench coat flapping in the cold winds and his face twisted up into his usual cocky, arrogant smirk. "Man, Dumbledore, you really are getting old if you're letting this moron get the better of you."

Relief spread through Albus and he could not recall a time when he had ever been as grateful to see somebody was he was now. He staggered up to his feet and adjusted his glasses as Voldemort took a step backwards, his crimson eyes narrowed warily at Harry's sudden entrance.

"Harry," Albus managed to whisper. "Be careful of his wand...it's dangerous and you cannot overpower it..."

Harry cocked his head and seemed to take it into consideration. Voldemort surveyed the two of them with a dangerous expression and his nostrils flared.

"Well, well, well," Voldemort murmured. "Harry Potter. I must admit, I was hoping that you would be unable to grace me with your presence tonight. Still, it matters not. This time, you will not escape, Potter."

"Funny," Harry responded coolly. "I was just about to say the same thing."

Dumbledore blinked and almost missed it. At once, both Voldemort and Harry flicked their wands and great bolts of light sprang forward. They collided and exploded with a thunderous roar and a shower of sparks, ricocheting away into opposite ends of the tower. One of them soared into the air while the other struck the ground and the tower shuddered. A large groaning noise filled the air and Dumbledore's eyes widened.

"Neither yourself nor Albus Dumbledore will leave here alive!" Voldemort promised with a hiss.

"Harry!" Albus yanked on Harry's coat. "You're going to bring down the tower! You need to..."

Harry interrupted Dumbledore by roughly yanking his clothes out of the other man's grip. Albus felt his eyes widen as Harry turned his head, a terrible sneer stretched across his face and a look of utter contempt in his eyes.

"You stupid old man," Harry spat out. "You're finished, Dumbledore. You're beaten. If he can beat you, then you have obviously reached the end of your usefulness."

Albus could only stand there, rooted to the very floor, as Harry reached up and grabbed Albus's face. "Besides," the Denarian continued with an uplifting tone. "That's no way to talk to a hero!"

Fire spread across Albus's skin and the old man did not have time to react as a blast of fire and heat exploded from Harry's hand. Albus was engulfed in flame and the very force of the spell sent him hurtling off the tower. His last vision was of Harry turning back to a surprised-looking Voldemort and raising his wand before he began to drop....

A/N: Hey guys. I've been told that the ending is kinda getting rushed and, well, to be honest it is. I need to get this done by Christmas or before New Years Day by the latest. I have an original piece, only 10,000 words but still a lot of work, that I have to start writing ASAP for a book compilation (Jbern was quite nice in extending me an invite) and I want to get started on my original soon. I also want to wrap this up as well, so...there you have it. Don't worry, I plan on doing justice to all of the characters.

Oh, and for those asking if Dumbledore will die- you'll get your answer here.

The fiery cacoon propelled Albus Dumbledore from the ruins of the Astronomy Tower and gravity took it from there as the beaten old man started a slow descent to the hard, unforgiving ground below. For a split second, Albus thought he would die and his mind settled into the peaceful and tranquil state of an old man who knew his life had been rich and enjoyable. Then, Albus opened his eyes and realised that he was not burning. Instead of a blazing inferno, he was wrapped in a soft and warm blanket of heat, which tickled and danced across his skin instead of searing his flesh off of his bones.

Harry Potter. Albus almost felt ashamed at his assumption of Harry's betrayal, but it was very hard to trust Harry Potter fully and even when one did, they could not forget the Fallen Angel lurking in the back of his mind, watching and analysing and waiting with eons-practised patience for the perfect moment...

Albus soared down to the ground and was preparing to use the last of his magic to cushion his fall when he realised that he was not falling as fast as the laws of nature had dictated. The blazing cacoon of flame around him was slowing his descent and Albus watched with tired eyes as he was propelled closer and closer to the Astronomy Tower. The deep cracks on the inside of the spire did not ease Albus's worry but the Headmaster sighed and finally allowed himself a respite. He was so very tired and every fibre of his body screamed

at him, pleased and begged for a chance to lay down his burdens and rest.

Lord Voldemort has strong and Albus was now feeling his bite.

Albus was almost prepared to leave everything up to Harry, to allow the Denarian Lord to take this weight from his shoulders and do with it what he wanted, when he noticed that the fire was drawing closer and closer to the side of the tower. Albus could have reached out and touched the stone of the tower with his fingers if he had wished too as the fire propelled him to one of the classroom windows. Albus tucked himself in a little ball and braced himself as he was slammed through the window. Little pieces of glass bounced off of the protective fire as Albus was gently lowered to the ground- which suddenly seemed extremely comfortable.

Albus closed his eyes and exhaled loudly. This was much better...a chance to rest, a chance to regain some of his strength before he went to assist his fellow Professors...a few moments of relaxation would allow him to be much more effective when he arrived at the battle..yes...he was so tired...

“P-Professor?”

Albus’s eyes shot open at once and he sat up, his crinkled blue eyes scanning the room. Was he so near death that he had failed to spot the presence of another person near him? Near the window, a huddle of Second Years sat pressed up against each other, shivering and wide-eyed. A barricade of chairs and tables precariously stacked up against each other kept them from the rest of the room.

“Mr. Barton,” Albus murmured, his tired mind catching up. Yes, yes, how could he have forgotten? Professor Sinistra’s Second Year class, the ones who he had sacrificed his wand to save- but they were not all here.

Albus stood up and ignored the bleeding gash in the middle of his charred, burned robes. He slowly hobbled to the other end of the room and paused. Grief welled within him at the sight of the dead students, his dead students, but he forced it away. There were three

more corpses, all Death Eaters- one burned beyond all recognition, and they had all been killed in a most gruesome manner.

Thankfully, Harry had arrived before he had.

“Professor?” the Second Year boy queried. He glanced nervously at his friends. “What...what are we going to do?”

What was he going to do?

There was still something Albus needed to do.

“Come with me and I will take you to safety,” Albus murmured with as gentle a smile as he could.

It was enough as the Second Years scrambled off the ground and crowded around him, as if he would be able to fend off the darkness that had already tried to kill them tonight. Albus flicked his hand and the fallen wand of one of the Death Eaters sprang up from the ground. Yes. He would take these final students to safety and then he would do his final part in the fight against Voldemort.

Perhaps then he would be able to rest.

“Interesting,” Voldemort murmured as he circled Harry in the ruined, cratered floor of the Astronomy Tower. His eyes gleamed over the end of his wand. “Plausible, yes. Likely, no. Yet, is still remains interesting...”

Harry cocked his head. “What are you babbling on about now?” he drawled.

“Do not think that you can hide Albus Dumbledore from my wrath,” Voldemort responded. He stretched out his arms as if he were gracing the world with his presence. “I will find him. Nobody can escape me. Your parents couldn’t. Albus Dumbledore will not. Neither will you.”

Harry shook his head and a derisive laugh escaped him, his scornful tones carrying around the tower as a bitter wind blew over them. “Oh,

Voldemort,” he sneered. “I suggest you keep your mind focussed on me. I am the prophecy boy, after all.”

Voldemort’s attention was now fully upon him. “The prophecy?” He hissed the word out as it was the most repugnant thing he knew.

Harry merely smiled and raised his wand. His entire body was thrumming with anticipation and the potent sea of Hellfire burned into his veins. His eyes scanned over the rubble around him and a plan sprung to mind. As Voldemort opened his mouth to being yet another attempt to kill Harry with long monologues, Harry dropped down to one knee and placed his hand on the wet and hard surface of the floor.

He did not say a single word yet his clothes glowed as previously unseen arcane runes sprung into existence. Static energy, gathered by his clothes every time he moved, leapt from his fingertips and slammed into the force with a noise akin to a dull clap of thunder. The ground screeched as arcs of power travelled from puddle to puddle, colliding on the surprised form of Lord Voldemort in an instant. A flash of light filled the tower and then Harry was blown back as Voldemort shrugged off the spell with a mighty gust of wind.

Little shards of rock whizzed through the air with the speed of bullets but Harry’s mind was moving faster than that and even as he twisted and turned in the air, his wand glowed and demonic runes flashed along the surface of the wood as he conjured a great gout of blazing fire. He landed on the ground with a thump even he brought his wand forward and sent the writhing mass of flames forward.

A great howl rang through the tower as the fireball sucked up the furious winds and grew larger and larger. Voldemort did not seem concerned, however, and as Harry staggered up he raised his wand- Dumbledore’s wand, Harry suddenly realised- and cast a simple curse. A flash of silver light blasted forward with the sound of a backfiring care and suddenly the fireball exploded. In the time it took for Harry to reflexively blink, the effodio curse had torn through his shoulder and exited from the other side. An instinctive sidestep had saved it from taking off his head.

Harry took the wound, fatal for most, without flinching as he narrowed his eyes. Voldemort was smiling with delight and his wand glowed with a sick, azure light. "Damn," Harry spoke up, his voice just a little hoarse as Meciél repaired tendons, bones and the top part of his right lung. "You've gotten fast, Voldemort. I don't think I can even cast that spell as well as that and, well, I love that spell."

"Prophecy," Voldemort said quietly. "Denarian. Hellfire. Knight. Sword. Boy-Who-Lived. These are the titles of your symbols of power, yet they mean absolutely nothing to me. You are powerful, Harry, but you were given your power whereas I have earned my power. You shall see the difference in the mastery of the two soon enough."

Harry considered that and took a step backwards. The shadows wrapped around him and he slowly disappeared from sight, hidden in the darkness. Voldemort merely stood there and waited, his wand held loosely in his pale hand. There was a shuffle from behind the Dark Lord and then Harry Potter jumped out, his wand held high and his eyes alight with fury.

"Avada Kedavra!"

A second later, Harry was split in two and a pile of rocks crumbled to the ground. Voldemort didn't even pause in his movement and his wand practically danced in the air as golems and illusions of all kinds assaulted him from every angle. A humanoid golem made of the shattered remains of the Astronomy Tower let out a mighty roar as it brought its fists down upon Voldemort as two illusions flanked the Dark Lord, weaving in and out of his sight. Voldemort swished his wand and the illusions disappeared and held up his non-wand hand, catching the gigantic stone fist of the golem. He clenched his fingers and the golem abruptly crumbled away into dust. A second later, Voldemort blurred and there was a large sizzling flash in the air as the Dark Lord parried the real Harry's wand away from him, a glowing coil of dark yellow spiralling away into the night sky.

"Disguise and trickery," Voldemort murmured. "The tactics of a coward. You will not win using that type of strategy, Harry. Come. Let us duel like real men, wizard to wizard."

Harry said nothing but he stepped back, his wand held up high. While he hadn't been expecting that to work, it was a little disturbing to see just how fast Voldemort was in covering his flanks and vulnerable areas. It was rare when he met an opponent whose reflexes were as good as his own, even rarer when they were better.

Voldemort flourished his wand and Harry's wings burst out from his back, crossing over his form and shrugging off a large slab of stone that crashed on his form. His body rocked under the blow but it gave him the chance for an immediate counterattack.

"Evertoxuro!" Harry muttered and he took in a deep breath of air. When he exhaled, it was as if he was pouring his breath into his wand as a gigantic jet of flame blasted from his wand as a wall of searing heat and fire.

Harry didn't see what Voldemort was doing as he ducked his head and sprinted forward, entering the fiery blast and hiding within it. The flames tickled and danced on his skin but otherwise did not harm him even as the Hellfire-enhanced magic burned at the stone beneath his feet. Harry nudged Meciél within his mind as the flames suddenly dispersed from around him and he looked up, giving Voldemort a feral grin. The Dark Lord was right in front of him, his wand outstretched and his eyes beginning to widen.

The world slowed down.

Meciél had exponentially increased the responsiveness of his nervous system and allowed for a massive rise in his perception. To Harry, it felt like he was swimming in warm water as everything around him practically came to a halt. The lingering remains of the fire was barely moving and the shadows on the walls were frozen. The object of his attention, however, was moving much faster than that- but Harry was quicker.

A green coil of light surged forward but Harry leaned back and fell to the ground, his momentum surging him forward and he crashed into Voldemort's legs. As the Dark Lord began to topple, Harry narrowed his eyes in concentration as his spiked, bladed wing zoomed up and cut a great slash through Voldemort's chest- the man had been fast

enough to dodge the potentially fatal blow. The other wing lashed out, slicing deep into Voldemort's leg at the bone and Harry grinned with malicious glee as he felt the Dark Lord's blood spray over his face. He raised his wand, Hellfire pouring into it.

"Avadad-

Voldemort's wand blurred, faster than even Harry could comprehend-even with his temporary boost- and a sudden burst of force slammed down on Harry. The Denarian was pressed against the ground and grunted, and a sharp pain flared in his skull. His vision became white and suddenly the world was moving normally again. Harry gasped and retched as the aftereffects of being knocked so carelessly out of his increased state washed over him and nausea, dizziness and double-vision assaulted him.

Nonetheless, he completed his curse and the looming figure of Voldemort jumped away as a green flash of light soared past where he had been standing a split-second ago. The Dark Lord looked incredibly satisfied as he leveled his wand at Harry, who was still on the ground, and cast a Killing Curse.

A green bolt of light blasted forward and an invisible wind assailed Harry's ears. There was no way he could avoid the curse. It would hit him. In the span of an instant, Harry acted instinctively and brought up a single bone wing to block it. The Killing Curse hit it and Harry stilled. Voldemort looked startled as Harry looked up at the wing of bone. The wing was blackening and turning to dust rapidly as green bolts of magic crackled and cascaded down the extra appendage.

The Killing Curse turned living cells into dead cells, sweeping through the body until they were all dead. While his bone wings, remnants of his demonic form, were dead, the flesh they were attached to at his back was not. Harry moved as a blur and his wand came rising up, a dim red light glowing at the tip. He swiped at the base of his wing and then flinched as the wing was cut loose from the body just a second before the end turned to dust.

Harry's world turned into agony. The loss of his wing slammed into his system and hit him like a truck, almost shattered his control and

flooding his entire body with pain. Harry let out a scream of pain-fuelled rage and his green eyes became wreathed in flames. Voldemort didn't have time to say a word as Harry flicked his wand and summoned great gouts of fire. Voldemort was pushed back as Harry advanced on him recklessly, Hellfire and magic surging through the air as Harry conjured spells of deadly flame again and again and again.

The pain blurred his mind and his vision for a few more moments before a soothing coolness spread through him. Harry blinked rapidly, his eyes frantic and his face pale and drawn as Meciél drew in his pain and anger. He swallowed roughly as the din of emotions and sensations in his body became a slight buzz in the background and glared at Voldemort with great fury.

"You fucking asshole," Harry whispered dangerously. "That hurt."

Voldemort shrugged off the last of the powerful fire and surveyed Harry warily. His robes were scorched and half of his face was burned. Even though the flesh was slowly healing back together- albeit, not as fast as Harry could have done it- it was a reminder that Harry Potter could and would kill him if he was not careful.

"Are you done with your tantrum, Potter?" Voldemort taunted and made a tscking noise. "Hardly the behaviour one would expect the Boy-Who-Lived."

A slightly maniac smile had crossed Harry's face. "I'm going to gut you like a fish for this," he said somewhat cheerfully.

"We shall see."

Voldemort lifted his wand in a flash but Harry had been faster in this draw and the Dark Lord ducked, gliding under a long arc of silver light that sliced three-feet deep in one of the few walls still standing. Harry assaulted the serpentine man with a constant barrage of spells and Voldemort went on the defensive, parrying, blocking and deflecting curses. They sprung away from him and soared up into the air, the multi-coloured hues of light looking somewhat like fireworks as they lit up the night sky.

Voldemort swept another volley of curses away from him as Harry let out a growl and flicked his wand. Large stones rose up from the battered, damaged tower and hurled themselves at Voldemort. Voldemort merely looked amused as he lifted up a single finger and pointed at each boulder in succession. One at a time, they exploded in a shower of dust. As Voldemort destroyed the last one, his crimson eyes widened as the silver blast of light hidden behind it surged forward and struck him on the chest with a loud crack.

Voldemort rocked on his feet but looked otherwise unharmed as Harry paused. The Dark Lord looked up at him, smiling thinly. "Are you aware that the skin of a Basilisk is as hard as a diamond," Voldemort murmured. He bowed his head and closed his eyes. "It's also prudent to remember that to look into the eyes of a Basilisk is...death!"

Voldemort's head shot up and Harry stared into a golden set of eyes. He went to cast a spell but froze- his arm refused to move! Harry found that he was trapped in the staring contest with Voldemort as golden light began to blur at the edge of his vision. He frowned and struggled as the constricting feeling crept up his body, his legs rooted to the ground. Harry could feel Meciél desperately trying to throw off the chains of terribly dark and intrusive magic from his mind and body as Voldemort slowly took a step towards him.

Harry tried to move again. Voldemort took another step and then another, keeping Harry pinned down with his unholy gaze. Harry's eyes were burning but he could not sweat and a small slither of fear was building up within him. Usually Meciél was quick in throwing off constricting spells of this nature. Voldemort was gliding towards him closer and closer and he stretched out an arm, a pale hand reaching as if to clasp Harry's throat.

If at all possible, Harry's eyes got wider.

And then his world went dark. Harry stumbled, shock flooding into him. He could move! His vision was dark, darker than it would be with his eyes closed, but he could still move. Harry heard a rustle of fabric

and he ducked down. Something white-hot split into his side as Harry gripped his wands like a sword and slammed into the ground.

“Terramotus!”

Harry felt the ground splinter and a loud cracking roar echoed into around him. The ground around him rumbled ferociously and stone groaned as it was viciously torn apart. Suddenly, as Harry crouched down in the effects of his own curse, his vision came back and Harry looked up at just the right moment as Voldemort was catapulted off of the edge of the ruins of the Astronomy Tower with a look of shock.

Harry panted as he lifted up his wand and cancelled the effects of his spell. His body was slightly bruised, but otherwise he felt well, and he blinked owlishly as he strode across to the other side of the Astronomy Tower.

“Did I just throw the Dark Lord Voldemort off the Astronomy Tower?” Harry murmured to himself in wonder.

‘I believe so,’ Meciél answered. ‘Be wary. You would find a way to survive that type of fall. He will too.’

Harry peered down into the darkness, trying to make out Voldemort in the glow that Hogwarts was emanating. He let out a groan as a sudden thought came to him. “Does that mean I have to go all of the way down there to fight him? Man, I just climbed all of those stairs five minutes ago.”

‘I do not think that will be a problem,’ Meciél said with a strange tone. ‘I think he will come back to you.’

Meciél nudged Harry’s head until he was staring at a little moving black dot that was skimming the surface of the great lake. Harry frowned and his eyes squinted as the little dot began to rise up off the surface and turned towards the castle. Slowly, the little dot became larger and larger and Harry gaped at what he saw.

“Is it a bird?” he asked as he took a few steps back from the edge of the tower. “Is it a plane? Of course it’s not.”

Lord Voldemort soared forwards; his crimson eyes little pinpricks of light in the distance as his cloak billowed around him like a cape as Harry raised his wand and flooded it with Hellfire.

“No, it’s...” Harry paused. “You know what? Fuck it.”

A massive surge of hell-empowered fire rocketed forward and a great howling noise rose up in the air as the fireball grew larger and larger as it moved. Voldemort lifted his wand and he was too far out for Harry to see what he cast but the blast of fire was torn apart. Little fireballs careened to the ground as Voldemort shot closer and closer to Harry, who scowled and did a series of short, sharp flicks.

The remains of the fire suddenly jerked in the air and Harry could make out Voldemort turning his head as dozens of little darts of fire converged on his position. Harry held out his hand and clenched his fist and the fireballs arced towards Voldemort as one and exploded. A large boom, strangely akin to a thunderclap, roared out into the night sky as the deadly fire twisted and flailed in a giant sphere of fire- with Voldemort in the centre.

There was a shimmer of light and Voldemort burst out of the fire with two large sweeps of his wand. Two great silver arcs of light soared down on Harry, who niftily dodged them both by jumping in between them. The powerful spells cleaved through the tower and Harry’s arms came out as he tried to steady himself. Before his very eyes, a large cross-section of the tower slowly crumbled and fell down towards the distant ground. The rest of the tower was wobbling as Harry gazed up at Voldemort with widened eyes.

“This, Harry Potter, is my power!” Voldemort roared in triumph as he hovered above the remains of the Astronomy Tower, his cloak flapping about him.

“And this is mine!” Harry roared back. He took in a deep breath, synced with Meciél and spat a Word.

The air around Voldemort grew moist and clouds rumbled in the sky. For the Dark Lord, it was quite possibly the worse place he could be

as a mighty storm grew above his very head skies. Thunder boomed as a searing bolt of lightning lit up the sky and Voldemort let out a high-pitched scream, electricity dancing over his finger as the tremendous force of a thunderbolt hurtled him towards the tower. Harry grinned, blood dribbling from his mouth, as Voldemort slammed into the floor of the Astronomy Tower with a great crash.

The tower wobbled dangerously.

The storm clouds above his head slowly began to disperse as Harry raised his wand towards the great pile of dust of Voldemort's impact. A gust of wind shot over the tower and the dust was propelled away, leaving the burned, scorched figure of Voldemort panting on the ground. A bloodied, blackened hole had been blasted into his chest and while Voldemort had some powerful regeneration powers, it did not come close enough to heal that type of damage. He was no Denarian Lord.

Still, Voldemort was only wounded.

Pain flared through Harry's body and his arms flopped uselessly to his side as they exploded in a large spray of blood. Harry glared down at the Dark Lord, who was clutching his wand tightly between his fingers as he tried to get to his feet, and tried to move his arms. His arteries and tendons looked to have been severed, and Harry levelled the last bone-wing up at Voldemort. A bright light glowed from the tip and a searing bolt of electricity blasted forward, striking Voldemort in the chest.

Voldemort spun through the air, but he seemed to have regained his bearings as he landed quickly on his feet, his crimson eyes narrowed. Harry could feel Meciél healing his wounds and could now move his wand arm- if only a twitch. He grinned at Voldemort maliciously.

"Cruento Adustum!"

The blood dripping to the floor in copious amounts glowed with a dim red light and rose up from the ground. It became a raging maelstrom of dark fire and Harry twitched his arm again, propelling the volatile

bloodfire towards Voldemort, who glided forward, his wand glowing with a dark light.

The tower wobbled and rumbled ominously.

Albus Dumbledore leaned against his chair and closed his eyes in exhaustion as the last of the frightened Second Years disappeared in a flash of bright light and an odd popping noise. He felt relieved and satisfied. His students would be spared whatever was going to happen to him. The cushions on his chair were pressed down and Albus would have let out a sigh of contentment as the charms on the chair attempted to soothe his aches if the situation was not so dire.

He opened his eyes.

The portraits on the walls stared down at him anxiously. Even Phineas Black, perhaps the rudest and most disrespectful of the former Headmaster portraits, looked concerned and worried. Feeling the blood ooze from the large gash on his chest, Albus did not blame them.

"I've let Saint Mungo's know of Albus's condition!" one of the portraits panted as she returned to her frame. The witch stared down at him with worry. "Now, you just rest right there Albus Dumbledore. Help is on the way."

Albus managed a tight smile and ignored his protesting body as he heaved himself off of the chair. He wobbled unsteadily on his feet and had to lean against his desk as his legs threatened to give out on him.

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Dilys," Albus replied quietly. His eyes became distanced and he stared at nothing in particular. "No, I have no finished just quite yet. There is...one more thing I must do."

"Are you mad, Dumbledore?" Phineas scoffed, looking decidedly unimpressed. "You're lucky that your old, battered body doesn't drop out on you at this very moment. You'll never survive those wounds if you go about running around like a man fifty years younger than you really are."

“Ah,” Albus acknowledged with a nod. “You presume that I will survive tonight.”

The Headmaster ignored the cries of distress and the look of utter shock that passed over Phineas’s face as he drew himself up and began to limp towards the door. He paused at the threshold and turned around to give a small bow to the other Headmaster’s.

“Allow me to say what an honour it was serving alongside you in this school,” he murmured and drew his head up. “Farewell, my friends.”

Albus slipped out of his office and began to make his lonely trek through the castle. In the distance, he could hear the sounds of sporadic fighting from his fellow Professor’s and his stomach twisted in knots as he heard a woman scream in pain. He longed to go and join them in their fight but his will hardened and he strode away from them. He had to think of the big picture.

The castle shuddered and Albus panted with exhaustion as he reached the right floor, leaning against the railings of the staircase. He pressed on and approached the location where Voldemort had snuck and hidden a Horcrux right under his very own nose. He strolled once, then twice, and then three times down the hallway and turned to the wall.

“I wish to find that which was hidden away,” Albus murmured.

A door appeared on the wall and the wounded Headmaster opened it and stepped into the Room of Requirements. There were items stacked together from the floor all the way to the roof and his eyes scanned over them, searching for a silver helm. He lifted the stolen Death Eater’s wand and cast a spell, and he was directed to the very corner of the room.

There it was. The Diadem of Ravenclaw. The last Horcrux of Lord Voldemort.

Albus leaned forward to pick it up but let out a startled cry. A loud crackling noise shot through the air and Albus jerked back as if struck. He glanced down at his hand and backed away tiredly, absently

noticing the torn and bloodied skin. Whatever protections Voldemort had put on his Horcrux had almost flayed his hand off.

Albus was barely aware that he was falling until he hit the ground. His old and tired body was beginning to go numb and his blinks were becoming longer and longer, his eyes drooping and an utter unbearable weariness settling in his bones. Albus gazed down at the hole that had been punched through his chest. He idly noted that the blood had once more begun to ooze out as the dark magic within it corroded his healing charms.

Was this it? Was this how Albus Dumbledore was going to die? Alone, in a secret room, to be undiscovered for who knows how long?

No. Albus was not going to die, not without inflicting a severe blow against the enemy.

He lifted up his tired wand and focussed his magic and mind on a single spell. Fire curled at the tip of his wand and the struggle to contain it was too much for Albus, who did not even try as he allowed the fiendfyre to pour through him and explode from the tip of his wand. A mighty blast of flame lifted up into the sky and a fiendfyre construct of Phoenix let out a deafening screech. Albus managed to guide the cursed flame forward and the enormous phoenix swooped down, clutching the silver helm with its talons. The Horcrux disappeared within the storm Fiendfyre and Albus felt a ripple of bitter coldness rush through the fiery heat of the Fiendfyre.

He smiled and the world burned around him, his body too tired to move.

Yes. This was a much more fitting death for Albus Dumbledore.

Albus closed his eyes and, for the first time that night, rested, his back leaned against the wall as the storm of Fiendfyre raged uncontrollably around him. Would the Wizarding World be safe now? If Harry killed Lord Voldemort, and he could only hope that the Denarian would succeed, would his world flourish once more? Would all of his efforts produce a tangible effect? Or would a darker evil rise

up and replace Voldemort, just as Voldemort himself had replaced his old friend Grindelwald?

Harry Potter himself could be that new evil.

Albus did not like that thought but there was little he could do now. Harry was strange, the way he was with his twisted sense of morals and Albus could not see the sarcastic, sadistic teenage boy tearing apart families and murdering innocent people the way Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters had. Harry sought personal power first and foremost. Whether that would change in the future was up to speculation. No. Albus's job was done. He had failed his best friend and one of his most intelligent students ever but in the end he had redeemed himself for his mistakes. If all went well, Albus's student would finish what the Headmaster had started and, hopefully, continue on his legacy long after Albus was dead.

The fiendfyre roared around him but Albus could barely feel it. His mind was drifting off and his body was becoming light as he welcomed the calm embrace of whatever lay beyond with open arms. Then, all of a sudden, something jerked on his arm and Albus's eyes shot open as somebody heaved him up and began to push him out of the room.

He blinked rapidly, stumbling and staggering along, instinctively leaning on his saviour as he was shepherded away from the fiendfyre. The smoke was thick in the room and his blurry vision could not see past the end of his long, crooked nose, but he thought he could make out a silvery glow surrounding him. His saviour kept pushing and pulling, forcing Albus to move long after he thought he had nothing left within him at all, until they reached the doorway of the Room of Requirements. They both toppled out of it and thumped to the ground, copious amounts of thick, dark smoke pouring from the open door. The door slowly shut behind them and Albus heaved in great breaths of air.

"Ms...Carpenter," he wheezed out, holding a hand to his chest. "Your...timing was...impeccable."

Amanda Carpenter nodded faintly as she stood up from the ground briskly. Her robes were tattered and her hair was singed, but it was the long, glowing silver sword in her hand that captured Albus's attention, and he smiled faintly.

"What were you doing, Professor?" Amanda demanded.

"I was...merely helping our mutual friend." Albus was content to lie down on the cold, hard ground for the time being. "Harry...will have his chance at ending this."

His breaths were becoming shallower and shallower and his vision was blurring at the edges.

"Professor?" Amanda asked in concern and her eyes widened in shock as she noted the great, bleeding wound in his chest. "Oh my god! Professor! You're...you're..."

"Dying?" Albus offered a touch wryly and he knew his eyes had just let out the briefest of twinkles. "Yes, that does...tend to happen to old men like me. I..." he coughed. "I must admit, I did not expect to survive my...my excursion to the Room of Requirements. I suppose...yes, this is... is much, much nicer than burning alive..."

Amanda looked tearful, her grief apparent on her face as she knelt down by the beloved Headmaster. "But...I saved you," she said lamely. "I...the sword told me to come here, to run into the room and save somebody. Why...why would it do that if you were going to die anyway?"

Albus did not have an answer to that. As his breaths began to approach his last, Amanda clasped one of his hands in her own and smiled weakly at him when he slightly turned his head towards her.

"You...have been a good influence on him," he murmured. There was no need to elaborate on just who 'he' was. "I...I think that, in the end, you...reminded him that he was still human..."

Amanda smiled at him tearfully. Neither of them noticed the Sword of the Cross glowing softly on the ground beside the fatally wounded

Headmaster. Albus exhaled loudly and closed his eyes, finally allowing himself to lay down his burdens and rest. The sharp pain in his chest was slowly dimming and drowsiness was settling in his tired old frame. It had been a long century, Albus thought to himself. Perhaps it was now time to see what lay beyond the veil of death. Perhaps he could go and see his family again.

“Professor!” Amanda shook his shoulders. “Professor! Look!”

Or perhaps not.

Albus opened his eyes and followed Amanda’s arm. The Sword of the Cross was glowing and little silvery wisps of light were rising up and seeping into his wound. Albus could practically feel the terrible curse on his wound drain away and he was simply baffled. Amanda looked at him with suspiciously bright eyes.

“I think someone up there doesn’t want you to die just yet,” she remarked.

Albus didn’t know whether to be thankful or annoyed and he hesitated as he reached for his wand. Even without the dark taint on his injuries, it was still severe. He didn’t have to put a healing spell on it and he didn’t have to slow down the damage to his body. If he truly wanted to, he could just let it all go and be dead within minutes. For the first time in a great many years, Albus yearned to be selfish and let this all go.

Then, with a sigh, he tapped his wound and conjured a bright golden light that flooded the bloody hole and sealed it all up with potent healing magic. The effort left him exhausted, even more than he already was, but that acceptable for now.

Maybe he had to shoulder his burden for just a little longer.

Harry had had enough. Conventional tactics had gone out the window as the fight dragged on and on. While Voldemort was not able to heal as fast as Harry could, his offensive power had definitely increased since the last time they had fought and it was becoming harder and harder to keep up with the Dark Lord with his usual repertoire of

spells. No, it was time to unleash the full might of his power in a single series of devastating blows.

Harry took a few steps back and sidestepped as a curse veered towards him, humming with an ominous buzz as it scorched the very air it passed on. His teeth were bloodied but his grin was feral. Voldemort, on the other hand, was the perfect picture of poise, his narrowed eyes revealing nothing of his intentions.

It was time.

Harry took in a deep breath and released a might Word. Voldemort paused in his movements and his serpentine face betrayed his shock as Harry released a Word that Albus Dumbledore had once used on the Dark Lord some time ago. The top of the Astronomy Tower stilled for a moment and the Word boomed out as if Harry had roared them into a megaphone. Twisted piles of stone were crushed into fine dust by the sound of this voice and the air rippled and twisted as something massively powerful yet unseen by the human eye shot forward.

Voldemort defended himself from it- if only barely,- the night sky ultimately becoming his greatest ally as he wrapped himself in a cloak of liquid shadows and took the brunt of the blow head on. The coiled darkness around him was flayed to pieces and the tower shuddered, several stones falling from the rubble-filled remains of the roof and beginning their descent to the ground below. Voldemort raised his wand from behind the tattered remains of his cloak of darkness but Harry was not done yet.

Albus Dumbledore had to use the Words of the Worlds sparingly, ideally choosing the best time and strategy for capturing his opponents with it. Harry Potter, on the other hand, was able to cast several Words in quick succession while only suffering minor internal damage.

Voldemort flourished his wand and gestured at Harry and a great fiery dragon arose from the cracks in the ground, Fiendfyre at its most potent soaring down with enough power behind it to make even Harry, the master of fire, pause. Harry, blood dribbling down his chin, closed

his eyes, focussed his mind and opened his mouth. Something resembling a rumbling stomach and the neighing of a horse left his mouth and Harry brandished his hands forward dramatically, his fingers curling up as he directed the Word in the centre of the room.

The fiery dragon surged forward as Fiendfyre roared in blind fury but abruptly stilled as it passed into the field of the Word. Harry relished the look on Voldemort's face as the Dark Lord backpedalled, sending a single crackling bolt of azure energy forward but it too paused within the field.

"Avada Kedavra!" Harry snarled between bouts of coughing and a green coil of lightning blasted forward- but it too was seemingly affected by the Word. Harry didn't pause and cast the curse several more times. "Avada Kedavra! Avada Kedavra! Avada Kedavra!"

Voldemort was eying the empty space between them with calculating eyes. He brandished his wand and little piles of debris and broken stone shot forward in a wide arc. Most of them were caught and hung suspended in the Word but some of them flew off the edge of the tower unimpeded. Harry watched carefully as his head pounded, certain that Voldemort had found an angle to strike at, and he was right. With a grand flourish of his wand, Voldemort drew the shadows around him and sent them spiralling forward. They zoomed at the Word but veered off and soared off the tower edge and split off to flank Harry on both sides.

Harry raised his wand and cast another Word, Fallen and mortal working as one to decipher yet another piece of alien language. His head swam with strange and bizarre thoughts and images flashed through his eyes that he couldn't understand. He ignored the splitting pain in his throat with practised ease as he tore the tender muscles yet again. A loud splitting hiss filled the air as Harry levelled his wand into the air and tensed his muscles.

Almost instantly, a loud wind howled through the room as the Word sucked in the very particles in the air with its sheer force. The ball of compressed matter soared into the air and hung there and the shadow streaks of power were yanked towards it with

uncompromising force, disappearing into its inky black depths. A small, notable sphere of absolute black was forming in the air as it began to suck up loose chunks of stone and debris from the tower top. The air was howling as the Word sucked in air and grew larger and larger.

“What is this?” Voldemort breathed and Harry could hear him over the background din. He smiled and did not answer.

With a yank of his wand, Harry tore down the Word between them and flicked his wand forcibly at the great dragon of fire which suddenly shot towards him. He screamed an incantation from his bloodied mouth and the dragon exploded with a deafening roar. At the same time, Voldemort was forced to jump into the shadows as Harry’s killing curses – which had remained suspended- suddenly shot towards him. He repapered almost instantly and his nostrils flared with emotion as Harry jumped towards him, his wand swinging up high.

“Crucio!” Voldemort cast instantaneously.

Harry stumbled in his charge but did not falter. White hot pain tore at his body and his mind, already fragile with the summoning of so many Words of the Worlds, quaked. A single second past before Harry managed to slice his wing up and cancel the spell. The tip of wing glowed and Voldemort caught a bolt of lightning with his bare hands, redirecting it back at Harry, who took the hit with ease.

Two wands swung out and collided and sparks flew through the air. A resonating boom echoed from each impact as the Dark Lord Voldemort and the Denarian Lord Potter dueled with each other in a series of curses, counter-curses and parries that were too blurred to be seen by the human eye. Harry was using the Word above him to his fullest advantage, parrying Voldemort’s curses towards it while positioning himself so that his own were not unduly affected.

Voldemort thrust his wand forward and Harry met him with a single curse. Something exploded in front of him and Harry’s vision turned white as his ears rang with noise. He was propelled backwards and was sent skidding across the ground. His body was aching and

Meciel was still trying to heal the damage done to his throat from the use of the Words as he stood up, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Voldemort made another gesture but Harry let out a loud snarl, his eyes gleaming with anger. He gestured at the hovering orb of inky blackness above him and a spell shot out of it and forced Voldemort to deflect it. The Dark Lord narrowed his eyes and Harry sneered at him as he drew himself up and held out both hands. He concentrated and, with great effort, tore out the first spell that Voldemort had lost to the Word and sent it careening back towards the Dark Lord.

Arrows of inky blackness leapt at Harry's command and slammed into Voldemort, who was only able to partially absorb them into a shield of darkness that surrounded him a mere second beforehand. More curses followed suit as Harry played them like a puppet master, forcing the Dark Lord to dodge and weave through spells that would rip through any normal person with ease. The Word began to shrink as Harry threw everything at Voldemort, massive gusts of air, spells, curses and even pieces of debris that had gotten sucked up in there, until Voldemort was surrounded on all sides and hard pressed to counter it all.

Harry smiled in satisfaction.

Then, Voldemort shifted on his feet and lightning coiled around his left hand as he brought it close to his chest. Harry stiffened and began to lower his arms when Voldemort threw his wand up into the air. The Elder Wand glowed with a dark purple light as it began to spin through the air, flashes of light surging forward in a rush to counter everything that was surrounding it. Harry barely made out the twitches in Voldemort's right hand as he controlled his wand remotely- a skill even Harry had a hard time using- before he brought his left hand forward and pointed at Harry.

Lightning flashed and Harry's left lung was turned to pulp as the deadly energy splattered his insides. Harry gagged as a meaty broth of his own flesh and organs filled his mouth, but the injury, while serious, was not fatal given the amount of pure Hellfire roaring into his veins at every moment. What was severely affected, however,

was his mental state and juts for a single split second both Harry and Meciell lost control of the Word hovering above them.

The world spun around him and Harry was propelled down into the ground as the Word plummeted to the ground, its mass no longer held up by Harry's will. Harry hit the stone ground and there was a large cracking noise as the floor gave way and he kept falling. The orb fell faster. Harry twisted around in the air and lashed out with a single wing. Relief flooded through him as it struck the wall and bit deep into the stone. Harry continued to fall as he used his wing to slow him down and lifted his wand when a deep tremble ran through the tower.

Harry looked down and his heart skipped a beat.

The Word, while disintegrating without Harry's power, was still pulling things towards its centre and to his horror the bottom of the tower was being sucked in to it. Cracks ran through the stone and something let out a loud groan in protest. Harry lifted his wand to do something, anything, when the tower finally let out the deep terrible lurch that it had been waiting for. The support braces and the wards, so badly damaged by Dumbledore, Voldemort and Harry's spells, finally collapsed and with a noise that sounded somewhat like a relieved groan the tower began to fall down upon the castle of Hogwarts.

Harry was thrown aside, his wand flying out of his hand as a tone of stone dropped on his good arm. His bones cracked and his muscles tore, he was bounced around on the falling stones and was utterly powerless to stop it as several hundred tons of debris crashed down upon him and pushed him close and closer to the roof of the school. His green eyes shot out above him and he saw Lord Voldemort desperately trying to avoid the same fate before his back hit something hard and his vision disappeared in a haze of blackness and sheer agony.

With a terrible crash, the Astronomy Tower of Hogwarts fell upon the roof of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and sent a terrible rumble throughout the surrounding land. A massive plume of

dust rose up into the air and hung there as the final trembles of the falling debris began to settle.

Omake

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Rocks Fell.

Harry and Voldemort died.

Dumbledore died too.

THE END

A/N: There you have it. This is the end of the Denarian Lord. See ya.

Or not.

(Big thanks to DLP as usual, although especially during this chapter when I needed some help figuring the Dumbledore situation out. Thanks guys. I wouldn't have gotten this far without all of your help and you can expect a nice formal thanks in the epilogue)

A/N: Merry Christmas everybody. Thanks to DLP for everything, thanks to Mum for an awesome Christmas lunch and thanks to Santa for a new pair of some pretty cool sunnies.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was simply beautiful to look at during the night. Every window would seem to gleam with twinkling lights and the giant spires of the ancient castle would proudly loom above the Great Lake, bathed in the glow of the reflected light of the water's surface. With a clear sky, Hogwarts looked as if it was made from celestial light- which only added to the mystique and beauty of the school.

But not on this night.

The Dark Mark covered the school with an eerie green glow, the skull leering down at its victims as the snake coiled and hissed within its grinning mouth. The lights of the school seemed to be duller and less vibrant than usual and large clouds had blotted out the sky, casting a dark shadow upon the school. Hogwarts was wounded. The Astronomy Tower, the school's tallest tower, had collapsed into the base of the school and massive plumes of dust rose into the air from the impact. A terrible shudder had run through the land around it, felling trees within the Forbidden Forest and causing large, surging waves to sweep over the Great Lake.

The beauty and safety of the school had been permanently dented and, for a moment, it seemed as if the darkness had finally finished what Salazar Slytherin had started a thousand years ago.

Harry drifted in and out of consciousness in the first few moments since the collapse of the Astronomy Tower. His mind was hazy, confused and disorientated and his ears were filled with a blaring, high-pitched whine. During his life, Harry had known pain. He had fought against Denarians and wizards and monsters and the Fae. He had fought in terrible battles, coming out with horrendous wounds, and had been tortured by an enemy completely lacking in humanity and mercy. There had been times when he had come close to death. In all of those times, in all of his life, Harry had never felt like this.

His body was hurting.

There was a tremendous pressure on his chest, on his entire body, and Harry, drifting closer and closer to the wave of weariness that threatened to overtake him, simply could not push it away. His head was wrenched in an awkward position, almost to the point of breaking, and a single wing of bone stretched from his back in a vain attempt to protect his chest from harm. It did little good and Harry could feel that the bone had shattered and twisted underneath the enormous burden.

He opened his eyes and was met with blackness. He took in a quick breath, letting out a low, grumbling noise of protest as his chest flared up with incredible pain, and tried to calm his panicked mind. Mentally, Harry reached in his mind and sought out Meciél. Hellfire was flooding through his body, frantically darting around to the most damaged areas in an attempt to heal them, and distantly Harry knew that he must be seriously injured for the Fallen Angel to focus all of her attentions on the healing process.

She must have been doing something because little by little Harry could feel the pain in his body diminish. He sagged back against the rough stone that surrounded him, suddenly feeling very tired. His body was lightening, as if a giant weight were being taken off of it, but he could still feel the tons of stone that had collapsed upon him.

Had Voldemort survived? Harry knew that the Dark Lord's body was not as durable as his own but it was still remarkable when compared to a normal human being. Voldemort had also been standing on the other side of the tower, the 'top' side that had fallen, so there was no guarantee that the Dark Lord hadn't spelled his way out of trouble and was assuming that he was victorious. Harry felt a vicious grin come across his face. Oh, he would show him. As soon as Meciél was done fixing up his body, he'd blast this rock off of him and show his appreciation to Voldemort with a kick to the face- a kick of fire.

Harry tried moving and he frowned. The pain in his body was steadily draining away but his limbs were still unresponsive. He tried to twitch his legs but, with a start of horror, realised that they had gone completely numb. He quested within his mind yet again but Meciél was a buzz in the background, a frantic, twitch that Harry couldn't understand but couldn't quite shake off.

Perhaps this was worse than he thought. Slowly, and carefully, Harry moved his arm just a twitch and his fingers flopped uselessly on a squishy wet substance. Harry grunted with exertion and tried to move his hand again but it was useless. His body was sluggish, as he didn't have proper control over it. Then, Harry stilled and his eyes shot downwards into the dark that surrounded him. His arm was on his chest, he was sure of it, but what was the wet and squishy? It didn't feel like blood...

Harry's fingers twitched and he slowly explored the area with growing dread and a rising sense of panic. His chest had caved and his internal organs were on display. Copious amounts of blood were seeping from his wounds and Harry swallowed nervously. With a sudden burst of concentration, Harry ignored the strain on his mind and took in a deep breath.

A sudden pain roared in his chest and his exhale turned out into a splattering cough- but it sufficed. A tiny puff of fire blew from his mouth, harmless to even a normal human, and lit up his body before his very eyes. What he saw made him shudder. His chest was a mangled mess of blood and gore, dark red streaked with black and yellow and green and all of the other precious fluids that the human body needed to live. One of his legs was simply gone and it had ended in a shredded pulp of flesh, gleaming white bone cracked and splintered at the end of the severed limb. The other was obscured by the stones. He saw one of his arms, twisted and bent like a gnarled stick, resting across his stomach, where three of his fingers clutched a round, oozing pile of meat. He couldn't feel or see his other arm and he suspected that it too had been destroyed in the collapse of the tower.

This was bad. This was really, really bad.

Harry knew his limit and it was with rising panic that he realised that he was in serious trouble. His chest was heaving with little shuddering gasps and Harry's eyes flicked around, trying to find something, anything, that could help him. The pressure was getting to him and he could feel his breaths becoming shorter and shorter. Harry's eyes bulged and his chest heaved- something rose in his

throat and he exhaled a mass of chunk and gore. It was too dark to make out the colour, but Harry didn't care. His mind was buzzing, aching and surging with frantic thought as the rest of his body began to go numb. He couldn't take a breath, he vomited again and it stuck in his throat, and he thrashed against the rocks as best he could, again and again and again. He was suffocating and drowning and his head became light as the darkness around him seeped into his head, lulling his poor, tired and battered body to sleep.

With one final attempt at breath, Harry's body shuddered and became abruptly still. His emerald eyes were blank as they peered unblinkingly into the darkness as his body surrendered to the cold clutches of death.

Amanda Carpenter raced along the corridors as fast as she could while allowing Professor Dumbledore to use her as a brace. She occasionally sent a worried glance to the old man by her side. Dumbledore was breathing quite heavily and his face was shining with sweat. Amanda didn't know what spells and charms the Headmaster had used on his wounds but while it seemed to be preventing him from dying it did little to help him recover. Privately, she thought that it would be best if she escorted Dumbledore to his office and left him there while she went out and fetched Madam Promfrey. After that enormous crash and the terrifying shudder that both Amanda and Dumbledore had felt, the latter had practically ordered her to help him to the site of the crash. Amanda had taken in the glint in the Headmaster's eyes and swallowed. Wounded the Headmaster may be, but she had a feeling that he was still much more capable than most people in the castle.

Amanda helped Dumbledore down a flight of stairs, adjusting the strap on the sword on her back, and turned to walk forward- only to stop before a wall that had not been there previously. A pile of broken rocks had covered the doorway into the next hallway. She stared at it blankly as Dumbledore took his hand off of her shoulder and approached it carefully. He reached out and tapped at it with the tip of his wand and a worried look came over him.

"Oh dear," he murmured, turning back to Amanda. "These stones came from the Astronomy Tower. It appears that there's been a

collapse on the castle, almost directly on top of the Great Hall, if I am not mistaken.”

Amanda’s blood ran cold. “Isn’t that where Voldemort and...and Harry are?” she asked hesitantly.

Dumbledore nodded. “Come,” he commanded and began to limp down the stairs. “There is more than one way to get to the Great Hall.”

Amanda followed after Dumbledore obediently as he led her down two flights of stairs, through a series of winding corridors and into a secret passage that sent her somewhere close to the Gryffindor Tower. As she pulled herself out of the grimy passageway, Dumbledore halted and his back tensed.

“-still need to know what’s happening!” somebody demanded.

“We can’t leave- unless, of course, you want the Dark Lord to...”

The two men rounded the corner and froze at the sight of Dumbledore and Amanda. Amanda gripped the hilt of her sword, her muscles tense, and gazed up at Professor Dumbledore for instructions. His back was to her but there was a distinctly displeased air about him, enough to make Amanda shudder. His anger was cold and deliberate, much different to Harry’s but no less potent.

“Dumbledore!” one of the Death Eaters finally breathed.

The other raised his wand. “Avada Kedavra!”

Amanda’s hand flexed and she brought the sword out from over her head and jumped forward. The coil of deadly green light shot forward and struck the glowing silver curse. The silver and green energies danced at each other but were seemingly repulsed and the curse veered off into the wall. Amanda moved automatically and, as if she had been doing it all of her life, lifted up her wand in her other hand and touched it to her sword. Faint silver light built up on the tip of her

wand and it was with a great cry that she sent it blasting forward, catching one of the surprised Death Eater's in the abdomen.

He collapsed as the other Death Eater moved forward, only to freeze and give a startled yell as Dumbledore flicked his wand. The man was sent sprawling to the ground and clutched at his leg desperately as an invisible force sent him skidding along the ground. There was an audible crack as the man hit the wall and he fell back limply as Dumbledore lowered his wand. The old man stared at the limp body of the Death Eater for a few moments, as if entranced.

"You'll have to forgive me, Amanda," he murmured quietly. He turned on her and the look in his hard blue eyes was enough to make her quake. "My mercy has been rather strained tonight and I'm finding it quite hard to restrain myself."

It dawned on Amanda that the Death Eater was dead. She swallowed, took a deep breath and smile up at him weakly. Given all that had happened tonight- given that she too had already killed- she could hardly condemn him.

"Let's go." She could barely recognise her own voice.

Professor Dumbledore nodded gravely.

They continued on until they reached a large hallway. Several witches and wizards raised their wands at the sudden movement but Dumbledore strode forward as if they didn't concern them. Amanda followed in his footsteps a little more hesitantly.

"Minerva," Dumbledore greeted quietly and Professor McGonagall boggled at the sight of him. Her own robes were tattered and she was clutching her arm, which had been heavily bruised and battered as a result of one dark curse or another.

"Albus!" she breathed. "Great Merlin!"

"Flattering, but not quite," Dumbledore replied wearily. "Not yet, at any rate. How are things?"

“The Death Eaters fled here a few moments ago,” McGonagall said. “They clutched their arms, as if they were called. The Order arrived as soon as they could and we’re expecting Ministry Aurors to be on the scene shortly.”

Dumbledore nodded and gazed over the group of Professors and Order members. “Minerva, I want you to take the injured and tired away from here. You,” he interrupted McGonagall’s protests with a slightly raised voice. “Will not be able to help as you are.”

He turned his head.

“Alastor, Filius, Nymphadora and Kingsley- with me, please,” he commanded. He paused and turned back to Amanda. The blonde girl gazed up at him and she could see his eyes soften. “Amanda, I would like you to come with me too, if that’s alright with you.”

“I want to,” Amanda said resolutely. “I...I need to. I can feel it.”

Dumbledore nodded gravely and made a curt gesture with his hand. Amanda followed the gaggle of witches and wizards that followed him, the feeling of the sword in her grip calming her nerves and steadying her resolve. It really did seem as if the tower had fallen on the castle. Many of the walls were crushed and destroyed and pieces of rock littered the ground. The suits of armour had been crushed underneath the unyielding weight and the portraits had been snapped clean in half.

There was a tense silence as the small group followed a trail through the rubble. Amanda could see scorch marks on the rocks around her and summarised that the Death Eaters had cleared a path with their wands. She eyed the destruction sadly- it was sad to see the place she had resided in for the last few years to be so broken and empty. After a few moments, Professor Dumbledore halted and Amanda clutched both her wand and sword.

The group moved into the remnants of the Great Hall and Amanda's eyes widened. The roof, which had once shown the splendours of the sky, had been destroyed and a rising column of rubble filled the roof. The tables were all gone, disappeared under chunks of rock the size of Amanda, and the banners that lined the roof lay tattered all over the ground. Dust was thick in the air and it tickled the back of Amanda's throat as Dumbledore's group walked in between the mountains of rubble. Dumbledore, Amanda noticed, was looking especially grim and Amanda kept her eyes open for a sign of Harry, any sign of him at all.

Then, they stopped. At the end of the room, a hustle of Death Eaters- at least fifteen of them- crowded around one of the stacks of rubble. Before Amanda or anybody else in the group could do anything they were spotted and one of them gave a shout of alarm. Instantly, every Death Eater whirled around, raising their wands and preparing to fight. Amanda glanced up at Dumbledore hesitantly only to notice that he was staring down at the Death Eaters with a look of utter coldness, an expression far different from his normally benevolent smile.

"For your sakes, I urge you to surrender quietly and peacefully," Professor Dumbledore said politely but Amanda could hear the chill behind his words. "Do not do anything that we will regret later."

The Death Eaters didn't budge. Then, a soft hissing chuckle filled the room and Amanda shuddered as a high-pitched voice filled with malice slid through the air.

"Albus Dumbledore," the voice murmured. "Why am I not surprised to see you alive and well?"

The Death Eaters parted and Amanda's eyes widened with fear as a creature of darkness stepped out from behind them. Lord Voldemort may have been a man once, but his body was now in tatters and Amanda cringed as she saw his open chest cavity. He was more magic than man now, the Dark Lord's body held together bindings of pure darkness and his sheer, undiluted power. His eyes glowed like coals, burning bright in the dim hall, glancing over the group and deeming them irrelevant.

It was the first time Amanda had ever seen Voldemort, but she was certain that he was the most terrifying individual she had ever met.

“I am glad that you’ve arrived, Dumbledore,” Voldemort said and stroked his wand with his fingers. They looked wet and pink, like a newborns, as if the Dark Lord had just grown them. “That leaves one less loose end to tie up.”

“Where is Harry Potter?”

Dumbledore’s question boomed off of the mounds of rubble and if at all possible Voldemort’s grin got even wider. The Death Eaters around him chuckled sinisterly and Amanda felt her heart sink.

“Harry Potter is somewhere under this rubble,” Voldemort answered honestly. “I know not of the extent of his rejuvenation abilities but I find it highly unlikely that he survived. Presumptuous or not, I will tell you that I have just killed him.” He smiled, baring his teeth.

Amanda felt unbidden tears come to her eye and saw Dumbledore bow his head in grief.

“Your apprentice put up quite the fight, Dumbledore,” Voldemort continued as he idly twirled his wand between his fingers. “I could see traces of your influence all over him. Oh, his duelling abilities differ much from yours but every so often there was a trace of movement that reminded me of you. I must admit, it gave me great satisfaction when I-”

Dumbledore moved as a blur and his voice boomed out an incantation. He flicked his wand and a column of crimson light blasted forward. The sheer power of the spell sent the hairs on the back of Amanda’s neck rising and her skin burst out with goosebumps. Voldemort, deflected the spell away with a flourish of his wand, dispersing it in a shower of sparks, although he seemed to struggle just a bit.

“Be wary, Dumbledore,” the Dark Lord hissed. “I may look like this but I am still far more powerful than you. You will not escape your end quite so easily this time, old man.”

Dumbledore drew himself up and Amanda clutched her suddenly glowing silver sword. She felt Voldemort’s eyes rake over her and take note of her sword with considerable interest.

“A little girl should not be wielding such a dangerous weapon,” he murmured quietly. “I will be merciful tonight. Drop your weapon and leave this place and no harm will come to you. My quarrel is not with your organisation.”

Amanda felt a surge of anger towards the thing in front of her. “Oh, believe me,” she growled. “I definitely have a quarrel with you.”

Lord Voldemort sneered.

Harry Potter opened his eyes.

He lay face down, listening to a gentle wind that rustled around him. It was quiet, far quieter than Harry was used to. Harry rolled over onto his back and his eyes stared up at the brilliant blue sky. The sun shone down on him, warming his body and soothing his mind. Harry was calm as he took note of how his body was perfectly healthy and he allowed a lazy smile to cross his face, one tinged with bitterness and acceptance.

“So,” he murmured to himself. “This is death.”

Harry sat up and brushed the grass out of his hair. He vaguely realised that he was naked but he could not bring himself to care. His power seemed to be out of his grasp, his magic unresponsive to his calls. The anger, rage and bitterness that Harry had always had welling up within him was simply gone and here he felt a peace that he had never managed to feel when he had been alive.

Harry slowly stood up and gazed upon the fields of grass around him. He was standing on top of a large hill. In the valley before him there

was a little, quaint thatched-roof house. Beyond that house lay fields of grain and rows and rows orchards. It was all very peaceful and Harry could feel himself relaxing. A smile appeared on Harry's face as the sun beamed down on him. It was like it was beaming down into his mind, soothing him as the dark dredges of his violent death were pushed away.

"I have to say that I expected Hell to be much worse," Harry called out to the trees around him but he did not receive an answer.

Harry frowned. His anger and panic seemed to be spent and all he could bring himself to do was to ponder his fate here in the afterlife. What was happening here? More importantly, why did this place seem so familiar?

"I've been here before," Harry murmured suddenly. "I know I have."

He began walking down the hill, naked and uncaring. The grass cushioned his feet against the hard ground and the wind ruffled his hair almost affectionately as Harry walked towards the small house at the centre of the valley. His mind blurred and he lost track of time and he might have been walking for a minute or an hour but he eventually arrived at his destination.

There were no glass windows and planes of wood had been lifted up to allow sunlight into the house. There was a tiny porch of sorts, where a rocking chair carved exquisitely out of oak let out a soft, fond creak every time the soft breeze blew over it. It was still very quiet and peaceful and the house seemed like it could have been there for centuries undisturbed. Harry approached the door but stopped and hissed when he bumped his foot against something. He looked down and saw a gleaming metal cube lying innocently on the porch. With a frown, Harry bent down and picked it up.

He inspected it carefully. It was a beautiful piece of crafting, that much Harry could tell. The metal was one Harry couldn't quite recognize. It had a silvery-white gleam to it, one that seemed to glow under the sunlight. The edges had been smoothed over and there was words carved into it from a language that Harry also didn't

recognize it. He turned it over in his hand and watched with faint surprise as it clicked. A light flickered within it and suddenly there were shimmering pulses of light surrounding him. Harry watched as little glowing angels spiralled around him and a haunting melody rose from the little box.

With a start, Harry realised that the cube was a toy. He dropped it like it burned him and took a step backwards, surveying the hut carefully. It hurt to think, to remember, but Harry dove into his memories and realised where he was. This was Meciél's home, the one she had lived in when she had been an angel of heaven- one who had taken a mortal family.

Was this Meciél's doing?

Harry approached the door and knocked twice. There was no response from within so Harry carefully pushed the wooden door open and stepped inside. Almost abruptly, the Denarian was struck with a potent scent of sulphur. He blinked, trying to get his eyes adjusted to the darkness, and spotted a hazy figure sitting at a long, rectangular table.

"Meciél?" Harry called.

The woman's head was bowed, her hair covering her face, and Harry approached her. He was right, the distinctive features of Meciél were unmistakable to his eyes and Harry stopped at the edge of the table. Very slowly, Harry put his hand under the woman's chin and raised her head. Silver eyes stared back at him and Harry smiled softly at the crying woman.

"You're such a sook," he teased gently as he took a seat at the edge of the table.

"Harry," Meciél said and her voice was laced with sadness and pain and rage. "I can't save you. I can't heal you in time."

Harry took in a deep breath and closed his eyes. He exhaled noisily and opened them again, giving Meciél a simple shrug. “No, I didn’t think so,” he admitted.

“You’re going to die.” Meciél, if at all possible, sounded even more distraught. “I won’t be able to save you.”

“Aren’t I already dead?” Harry asked curiously.

“No,” Meciél answered and took his hand into her own. Her thumb stroked his palm as she hummed a little tune under her breath before she continued. “You are between your last breath and your death. I called you here, so that...”

“So that we could say goodbye?” Harry offered after Meciél trailed off. “Cheerio? See ya later? Piss off?”

“This isn’t funny,” Meciél said quietly.

“I’m not laughing,” Harry admitted honestly.

“I can’t save you,”

“I did get pretty fucked up, didn’t I?” Harry admitted with a whistle of admiration. “I can’t believe that I lost to a pile of rocks. Voldemort may have contributed but in the end I was killed by a rock. That’s just shameful.”

“You’re going to DIE!”

Harry’s eyes widened but he did not move as the house was torn apart from the force of Meciél’s shout. A wild shriek lifted up into the air and blew the wooden structure around him away until all that remained was the table. The wind howled and clouds rumbled ominously in the sky as the cheer that the sun brought out was replaced by despair and rage. Harry gripped the table but stayed still as Meciél seethed and raged with a power that far dwarfed his own. Hellfire roared around her, ripping through the air and the ground, and her eyes were burning with fury and anguish. The ground began

to shudder and it began to rain before Harry finally stood up and walked to Meciél. He entered the fiery corona that surrounded her and, with a small pause, wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into a hug.

At his touch, Meciél relented and the hellfire boiling the air around her disappeared. Harry looked down at her fondly and with a bit of a smirk. "Man, you are being such a woman about this," he jeered into her hair.

Meciél pulled back, suddenly looking angry. "How can you just stand there and accept this?" she hissed. The clouds above rumbled ominously.

Harry shrugged, still feeling quite calm. "I've only got a few regrets, Meciél- one being that that fucker Voldemort managed to kill me. I've known that I was going to die one day, and you know that I've never been afraid of death."

"Do you know where you're going to go after this?" Meciél whispered and her voice sent a shiver down Harry's spine. He shuddered but composed himself, taking a deep breath and grimacing.

"I have a fair idea," he answered quietly. "I probably deserve it for all of the shit I've pulled. I haven't exactly been a nicer person, Meciél. Still, I'd probably do it all again if I was given the chance." He paused. "Except for the parts where I got tortured and where Voldemort killed me. That just sucks."

Meciél opened her mouth but abruptly froze. Harry frowned as a high pitch howl shot around him and the illusionary world began to break apart. The sky cracked, as if it were a gigantic mirror that was beginning to crumble away, and the ground began to shudder again. Large black scotches were beginning to replace the beautiful landscape around him and Harry sighed, taking a step away from Meciél and grimacing.

“Ah well,” he murmured, scratching the back of his head. “I suppose this is where I say that I’m really going to miss you.”

Meciel stood before him, her head bowed and her hair covering her face. Her silver and white dress was stained with grass and her own tears and her hands were trembling in a rare display of human emotion. Harry had never ever seen her like this before and a dull ache ripped through his heart at the sight of the woman who had raised him so distraught.

He hid it with a grin. “I’ll be sure to give Lucifer a good kick to the balls for you,” he remarked.

“This isn’t funny,” Meciel whispered. “You’re leaving me. The one I poured my heart and soul into is leaving me again.”

Harry bit his lip. “You’ll get over this, Meciel,” he said quietly after a few moments. “I dunno much about loss, not since I found you, but I know you. You’re strong and you’ll find somebody else to raise and love and they’ll be loyal to you as long as they live.”

“How can I replace you?” Meciel asked with a tired sigh. She raised her empty eyes at him. “You, who I loved like a...” she trailed off.

“There are plenty of people out there like me,” Harry admitted. “I was blessed when I found you- and yes, I get the irony. You can..”

“I can’t replace you,” Meciel interrupted and silver eyes blazed with emotion. “You were always special, always different. I think we were meant to find each other.”

“We did,” Harry responded gravely before he hesitated. He made a face. “Shit. I can’t believe we’re saying all of this. It’s...”

“True?” Meciel supplied with a wry smile.

“Corny,” Harry finished and grinned. “In the end, I guess we’re both a couple of saps.”

A loud noise boomed in the air and Harry froze on his feet. He looked up and repressed a shiver as he saw the skies turn red with fire. Lava was beginning to seep through the cracks of the ground and a terrible odour of sulphur was rising in the air. Harry was very familiar with demonic powers but he had never felt anything as powerful and strong as this- not even Meciél. Every fibre of his body was protesting against this massive presence, which dwarfed over him as a dangerous, deadly spectre. Something was coming for him.

“Fuck,” Harry uttered quietly and closed his eyes in resignation. “Do you know what, Meciél?”

The Fallen gazed at him as a massive fiery visage began to form in the sky. Harry glanced at it as it took the shape of a massive demon made of pure fire. It was the size of the hills around him and it carried a long, coiled whip of looping flame.

“I really wish I’d bought sunscreen,” Harry groaned with a sigh. He raised an arm and watched as the pure heat began to blister his skin and pain shot through his body- or mind: whatever he was at the moment. He turned his head at Meciél. “Meciél, I...”

The demon roared with a bellow that challenged the heavens and it brought its whip down on Harry. Harry screamed in agony as the fire coiled around him and lifted him up. His vision was red and his body was melting but he managed to extend his hand to Meciél, who strained for it as best she could.

Then he was yanked up and away from the Fallen Angel and his senses and mind grew white with pain and he lost all conscious thought.

Meciél watched him go with anguished eyes.

No.

This couldn’t happen. Not again. Not when she had finally found somebody after all this time.

Harry was special to her. Harry was hers. Her son, her lover, her guardian, her dependent. In the beginning, she had not gone to him expecting anything else than a host to mould as she saw fit. But, she had never had a child as a host before and his utter yearning for a family that cared lit something deep within her.

She could relate to that.

Meciel had been banished from the higher planes because of her love towards a human. She could admit to herself that it had been worth it- even if she had lost everything. Could she make a similar sacrifice now- even if it cost her more than she had ever paid before?

Yes. Yes she could.

She reached outwards, reached into the darkness of the Void where her spectral prison lay nestled between the terrible energies that sought wash away everything that she truly was. Her true power was there, fending off an eternal assault as she gave her hosts whatever she could spare to keep her sanity.

She took it all and gave it to the coin. The darkness did not wait and it came rushing in as the last of her massive power vanished. For the first time in aeons, Meciel, Lady of the Denarians was truly vulnerable.

Perhaps it would save Harry.

Perhaps it was already too late.

Nevertheless, it would be worth it just for the chance.

Meciel resigned herself to her fate as the eternal darkness enveloped her. Then, there was a rush of power and Meciel found herself moving, moving away from the darkness and being flung straight back to the mortal realm. Her final vision of her former prison was a bright flash of white light as something vast, unmovable and powerful interceded on her behalf.

Then she understood. Harry's fate, her fate, entwined as it was- it all made sense. Meciel focussed her attention on the bright light and

wept for a single moment and then turned away. That life was gone. A new one waited.

Underneath the rubble of the Astronomy Tower, no less than fifty metres away from the crowing Lord Voldemort, Harry Potter's battered, beaten and mangled body twitched. Unseen to all, something glinted within the pulp that remained of his chest and a silver coin glowed bright with suppressed heat. It began to melt, searing hot metal dripping into bloodied flesh as the silver denarius was destroyed forever.

Green eyes suddenly shot open and Harry Potter screamed.

A/N: Hey guys. This is the second last chapter of the entire series. I've already finished the epilogue, actually, but I'm going to wait a day before posting just in case I get an urge to put something else in it. I actually went back to the second-last and the last scene of this and rewrote them to be better. I'll give a more comprehensive A/N in the next chapter, so read and enjoy.

It hurt. It hurt so much.

Harry screamed and screamed as his entire body was engulfed by an unyielding tide of energy. Fires roared within him, seeping from the pores of his bloodied, grimy skin as drops of white-hot liquid fire. His eyes burned and shrivelled in his sockets, only to heal almost instantly and be burned again, and his hair caught fire. His entire body was flailing about and an enormous pressure was pressed down on his body, crushing him down onto the hard ground below. For a split-second, the little semblance of conscious thought that Harry had left idly noted that Hell was just as bad as he had imagined.

Something cracked from within him and Harry knew the true definition of the word agony.

His world, his entire existence, was suddenly engulfed by a massive surge of something that ripped into his fragile psyche and implanted itself there. Pain itself lost all meaning as this enormous, mind-shattering sensation swept through every iota of his body. The very molecules that made him human shuddered and quaked as something otherworldly settled upon them, crafting a place within his body for itself. Harry didn't know how long this went on for as he lost meaning of time but it occurred to him at one point or another that this massively overwhelming presence that threatened to tear his mind and soul in half was very familiar.

In fact, it felt as if he had known it all his life...

Although he couldn't see or feel it, a maniacal grin had spread across his blood-soaked face as potent currents of raging Hellfire crashed through his torn-apart body and began to stitch it back together again.

The pressure around him abruptly collapsed and Harry began to rise through the rubble as wings of bone began to grow from his back...

Professor Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort stared down at each other, equal stares of determination and anger crashing against each other in waves of icy-cold blue and glowing malevolent red. Standing a little further back from the two majorly powerful wizards was Amanda, who struggled to fight against the aura of power that surrounded them. Professor Dumbledore was looking better, yes, but he was still wounded and weakened. Yet, Lord Voldemort was faring no better and from his wounds dripped horrible, revolting black ooze-like the liquid shadow that surrounded and bound his battered, barely-held together body.

Amanda looked upon the greatest Dark Lord of a thousand years and shuddered. He was not human anymore, not even close, and fingers tightened around the hilt of the Sword of the Cross. She would harbour no feelings of regret for cutting this thing down.

It was an over-anxious Death Eater that made the first move and a panicked voice began the confrontation between the Order of Phoenix and the Death Eaters. Alastor Moody surged forward much faster than a man with a wooden leg was allowed to, his wand flicking and spinning as he begun a series of short duels with anybody who got in his way. Flashes of light blasted from his wand and his enemies were forced back by the prowess and skill of Britain's best Auror- retired or not. Kingsley and Tonks were quick to engage their enemies, Tonks using her unique talents to her advantage as she dodged by contorting her body shape in and out, stretching her arms and delivering spells from angles that were hard to counter, while Kingsley fought with the solid strength and skill of a well-trained Auror, calmly countering and disabling his foes with on-the-mark spells. With Filius Flitwick jumping around with a high-pitched scream and a whirl of sparks, the debris-filled Great Hall was soon filled with the grunts and screams of a wizard's battle.

Most of it went over Amanda's head. Every now and then she would duck and dodge a spell almost absently as she kept her blazing grey eyes on her enemy. If Lord Voldemort was unnerved by her state, he certainly didn't show it. In fact, Voldemort had seemingly dismissed

her as he remained motionless, staring down at Dumbledore with glowing eyes. The Headmaster gazed back, visible strain reflecting from his face as the two powerful wizards locked gazes.

Amanda drew her sword with a flurry of silver light and took a step towards Voldemort, her efforts powered by a single, unbreakable intent. Then, a ripple of almost-unnoticeable power swept through the hall and both Voldemort and Dumbledore froze and staggered back.

One moment, Amanda was standing on her feet and the next she was on the ground as the sword clattered uselessly out of her hands. She groaned and clutched her head as a shrill pitched noise blared in her head. For a moment, Amanda thought she had hit her head on something but as she looked around at the Death Eaters and Order members, most who were clutching their ears from their own positions on the ground, she realised that everybody could hear it.

The noise reverberated in her skull until Amanda let out her own scream of frustration and pain, which went unheard in the din. The Sword of the Cross was flickering madly by her side- Albus Dumbledore looked almost hopeful and Lord Voldemort was whirling around furiously as waves and waves of potent and familiar power blanketed the hall.

That voice was familiar. Amanda had heard it before.

The voice tapered off and an explosion rocked the hall as one of the towering stacks of debris simply exploded outwards. Amanda, and the rest of the Great Hall, looked up. A bright glow burned from the cracks and shadows, a pulsing wave of heat and power that swept through over the observers like a blistering hot wind. Amanda covered her eyes but peeked through the cracks of her fingers. Her heart seized as a figure emerged from the debris and her breath caught in her throat.

An angel was ascending right before her very eyes.

Amanda watched, amazed, as a glowing figure completely shrouded with a bright white light hovered over the ground. She paid no attention to the gaping Death Eaters and Order members, or to the

pleased expression on Dumbledore's face and the furious expression on Voldemort's, as the angel arched its back and produced a set of long, bright wings. Hues of red and yellow covered them like feathers and the angel glared down at them all with a vast and terrible fury.

Then it all became wrong and the angel visage disappeared as the bright light began to recede. The glow became a corona of twisted, hellish flames that encircled the 'angel's' body. More of its body appeared before them, revealing twisted, contorted pieces of flesh and gaping, bloodied wounds that would have killed any normal human. Amanda gagged at the sight of the 'angel's' torso but could not look away as its wings, wings made of sharp, demonic-looking bone flapped lazily in the air. The wings feathers were made of fire, which twisted and turned and bound itself to the bone just as good as flesh. Drops of liquid flame fell to the ground, sizzling through pieces of rock and eating away at all it touched with its corrosive, dangerous properties.

The angel had turned into a demon.

Harry Potter had awoken.

Despite the great sense of relief to see that Harry was not dead, Amanda couldn't help but cringe in fear at the sight and the presence of Harry as he hovered above them, seemingly mindless to them all. His eyes had become wreathed with flame and it filled his eye-sockets. His nostrils and open mouth gave off a hellish-glow whenever he exhaled and the smell of sulphur permeated through the room, far more potent than anything Amanda had felt before. The worst part was the sheer presence Harry was giving off. There was a vast and ancient aura about him, something that made her feel as if she was a small, trembling rat beside a gigantic behemoth. This aura flickered on and off and Amanda watched with dread as a symbol burned into Harry's exposed innards, the silvery sign of Mieciel.

Even as she watched, the Hellfire roared over Harry's body and the Knight was suddenly reminded of Voldemort, and how his body was being held together with his own sheer power when by all rights he should have been dead. It saddened her, in a way, to see Harry so

inhuman, but this feeling was fleeting and lost beneath the turbulent emotions of fear, panic and wonder as Harry hovered over them all.

The Hellfire continued to warp around Harry's body but Voldemort had overcome his shock and only two words to say.

“Avada Kedavra!”

A green jet of light surged at Harry and the Denarian Lord's eyes snapped open with a terrible anger. His wings rose up and he soared underneath the curse. In a flash of an eye, Harry had propelled himself at Voldemort and they collided. Voldemort was thrown back and screamed as the Hellfire around Harry began to surge through him, toxic to his veins. At the same time, the floor cracked and the force of Harry's momentum sent them both crashing through the Great Hall and down into the dungeons of Hogwarts.

Amanda raced over to the edge of the newly created chasm and peered down it anxiously. As the battle began to rage around her once more, Amanda bit her lip as a haunting sensation swept across her. Perhaps she was just imagining it, but she couldn't help but feel that that would be the very last time she saw Harry Potter.

Lord Voldemort had known fear before.

Long ago, before he had known of true power and magic, he had feared the older boys at the orphanage, as they were stronger and bigger than him. They could- and did- hurt him with very little trouble until his illustrious heritage had caught up with him and he had defended himself in a manner which made physical strength mean absolutely nothing. During his years at Hogwarts, he had felt fear whenever Dumbledore started poking his abnormally-crooked nose into his business. He hated the man, yes, but he could recognize power when he saw it and knew that if the old man ever caught wind of his motives and actions then he would be arrested and thrown in Azkaban.

Once he had left Hogwarts, his lingering fear of Albus Dumbledore had remained. When he had gone underground, building up his support and delving deeper and deeper into avenues of might and

magic, he had been forced to hide from Dumbledore's ever-seeing gaze. It seemed as if the man had an entire network of people and non-human beasts who owed him favours. He revealed himself to the Wizarding World and struck fear into the hearts of the weak-minded fools who ran the Ministry and had almost been on the verge of victory when Dumbledore had stepped up and the Order of Phoenix had been created. Dumbledore had rallied capable wizards and witches to his banner, Dumbledore had opposed him on every front, Dumbledore had brought hope back into the Wizarding World.

Until tonight, Albus Dumbledore had always been the one man that Lord Voldemort had feared.

Harry Potter had been an inconvenience, a credible threat, yes, but never as great a problem as Dumbledore. The boy had been a minor pest during his revival ceremony and had only defeated him on a stroke of luck and with the help of a potent magical artefact. He had fled before the fury of Lord Voldemort's wrath several times and while the Dark Lord did acknowledge the boy's power and skill, it simply had not been enough. Still, the potential had been there and there was always the lingering threat of the prophecy to make Voldemort consider his options. The raid on Hogwarts castle had been more about removing Dumbledore as a threat (for, without the hallowed wand what good was he?) than in gaining a potent weapon against Harry Potter.

Now, on what had seemed like the eve of his triumph, Lord Voldemort looked upon Harry Potter and felt true, undeniable fear rising up within him. The battle against Harry Potter tonight had changed it. The Denarian had received a radical rise in both terms of skill and power and Voldemort had struggled against Harry Potter as the boy used archaic magic that not even he knew in an attempt to completely devastate his opponent. The collapse of the tower had been a boon to Voldemort, who had been relieved that the newly-second threat to his power had been literally crushed.

But it had not been enough.

Voldemort's killing curse sailed over Harry Potter and the Dark Lord barely had time to move as the vengeful demon was upon him. His

body wracked and trembled but his control over the darkness held him together as he siphoned off much of the force of the blow into the shadows around him. It was not enough and the ground cracked and was torn apart under the force of the blow. Voldemort hissed in irritation as both he and Potter crashed through the ground and disappeared from the sight of the Great Hall.

Then darkness warped around him, fending off the enraged Denarian as they fell, but the roaring waves of fire cascading around Potter's form tore at his aura of darkness. Voldemort screeched and flung himself away from Potter, swinging his wand and landing neatly on the ground below. Potter had no such finesse and as Voldemort stood up he crashed into the ground with a loud boom and a cloud of dust.

Voldemort peered over his wand, giving his surroundings a quick once-over. They had landed near the Slytherin Common Room, crashing through two levels. Above, he could make out the remains of the roof of the Great Hall through a giant crack in the ceiling. Every so often, a flash of light would light up and Voldemort knew that his loyal servants were fighting once again.

They could not win, not with Albus Dumbledore there, and Voldemort was concerned. He had banked much upon this raid tonight, but the Order of Phoenix had responded much quicker than he had anticipated and Albus Dumbledore, even without his precious phoenix, had survived wounds that should have killed him.

Lord Voldemort swept his gaze down at the plume of dust, which was beginning to disperse. The ground trembled below his feet and Voldemort suddenly jumped back as he sensed faint movement right beneath him. A split-second later, the ground where he had been standing was torn apart and the fiery-winged demon burst up from the ground. Voldemort flicked his wand and a vicious bolt of magic tore through the air, but Potter had in his hand a large piece of rubble and threw it straight at it. The sharp-edged rock exploded and Voldemort swished his wand, propelling the deadly pieces of shrapnel back at Potter. The debris flew at Harry and tore into him but it seemed to have little effect. Every new cut or wound on his body was filed with the liquid fire that surged around him.

Voldemort allowed a grimace. He briefly wondered if this was what his various opponents throughout the decades had felt when they had encountered him and his inhuman constitution.

But he was Lord Voldemort, and he was no mere wizard. The Dark Lord raised his wand and came at Potter with a vengeance. His magic hung thick in the air as terrible clouds of darkness, while Voldemort spun around Potter and attacked him from all angles. Spells shrieked through the air and impacted on the fiery being, which turned and tossed and flailed about as Hellfire roared around him. Most of the spells were shrugged off or simply dispersed by the cloak of flame, which served as a protective shield in many cases. Voldemort noted with a certain shrewdness that while Potter seemed to have lost all shred of conscious though the being that he had become had been quick to avoid the Killing Curse he had used.

Voldemort paused in his offensive and became guarded when the creature reached out and pointed at him. Fire pooled at the tip of his finger, which was more bone than flesh, and Voldemort brought up his cloak of shadows and darkness as a roaring streak of white-hot flame shot at it. It cut deep into the shadows but was snuffed up and Voldemort withdrew them and stood upright, glaring hatefully at whatever Potter had become. He concentrated and his entire body surged with a terrible delight as he wrestled with the darkness around him and sent it forward as a lance. Potter attempted to block it with a swipe of his hand but the shadows slithered past his limb and wrapped itself around the creature.

Voldemort lifted his wand, his eyes gleaming, as Potter withdrew his giant wings of flame and broke free of the chains. A bright silver glow formed at the tip of his wand and he hurled it at Potter. The walls and floor around him shuddered as Harry became encased in a giant silver glow and Voldemort twirled his wand as he created a prison of solid rock for the creature, who was encased in a giant cube of stone. Voldemort lifted up his free hand and a dark light flared on his finger tips. He made a motion and the rock suddenly glowed with runes of dark light, which spiralled around it as Voldemort completed the powerful enchantments.

The cube of stone was beginning to glow but Voldemort did not seem to care and he took a step back as the first pieces of rock fell off of the creature and onto the ground with a loud shudder. Potter looked enraged as the fire roaring around him ate away at his prison. The runes continued to spiral around the Denarian as the last of the rock fell away and Voldemort clasped his wand with an intense look of concentration.

Potter took a single step towards him, the fires in his eyes burning brightly, before he abruptly paused and Voldemort felt a smile coming over his thin lips. He wrestled, tamed and mastered the dark magic within him and sent it pouring into his spell. Potter raised an arm, fire beginning to glow in his hand again, but Voldemort clicked his wand and the fires died away. The creature looked furious but still did not make a single sound as Voldemort branded the runes upon his arm and watched as flesh and flame began to turn into stone. A grey, murky mist hovered over the limb as Voldemort channelled the petrification spell into the demonic being before him.

Harry Potter looked at his arm and smiled.

Hellfire roared around him and a great mass of it left his wings and body, wrapping itself around his solidifying hand. Before the Dark Lord's eyes, the stone began to flake off and the Denarian's fingers twitched. More and more Hellfire wrapped around the limb and Voldemort knew that his spell would last only a second or two longer.

He smiled. Good.

With a sudden burst of speed, Voldemort dropped his concentration and spun around, his wand flourishing forward with a loud hiss. The Dark Lord drew himself up and levelled the powerful wand at his opponent, a terrible incantation leaving his lips.

“Animus Discerpo!”

The soul severing curse, one that Voldemort had learned in order to carefully split apart his own, exploded from the tip of the elder wand in a ripping arc of pure white light. Potter, with much of his fiery aura centred on his limb, took the arc directly in his exposed chest and

froze, his entire body shaking madly. Fire sprang up around him as the white light ate through his fiery aura and began to tear it apart as Potter threw back his head and closed his eyes.

Voldemort had deduced that while Harry Potter had a physical body the entity known as Meciél did not. If she existed as a spirit, there had to have been some form of spiritual or soul-like energy binding her existence together. All that was left to do was to kill the body...

Voldemort flicked his wand and summoned a great portion of his power. It left him in a chaotic rush and a tidal wave of magic and his arm buckled, a great beam of deathly green light exploding forward. Potter merely stood there as brilliant white light scorched him in places where normal fire couldn't.

The demon before him snapped open his eyes and opened his mouth. Everything seemed to still and Voldemort felt a great rush of air fly over him, as if the demon was inhaling all the air around him for a mighty roar, and then the world screamed in protest.

Potter's voice was overlaid with the voice of a mighty being and her shrill tones resonated out into the real world. Voldemort's vision went white as a great force swept over the corridor and tore it to shreds. Walls, floor, and ceilings- everything was rendered unto dust. Voldemort brought about his cloak of darkness a second early and wrapped himself in the comfort of the shadows as he was battered and bounced along hard surfaces. His feet skidded along the ground and he planted himself there, fighting against the roaring tide of energy with all his might. He held up a hand in futile effort, his feet scraping backwards as the screamed reached its peak. With his eyes obscured, he could not see what was happening but a terrible groan struck his ears and the sound of rushing movement was the last thing he heard before his mind went dark.

It was wet.

That was the first thing Lord Voldemort was able to discern as he regained consciousness. He could hear the steady trickle of water nearby and a cool gust of wind struck his battered and broken body

as he lay there. His crimson eyes shot open and they glowed ominously in the dark tunnel. With a start, he realised that he was in the sewers of Hogwarts and was lying face down in dirtied, muddy water. With a scowl, he tried to stand up and his vision blurred.

For the first time in a very long time, Lord Voldemort let out a cry of pain and doubled over. His disbelieving gaze shot over his body, where the darkness was desperately trying to stitch it back together. His pale skin was in tatters and as his power was literally oozing out of his body. One of his arms was simply gone, while the other was broken, twisted and useless. Voldemort had removed much of his ability to feel pain long ago, considering it a hindrance in the path for true power, but he still felt enough to know that he was hurt- hurt far greater than he had ever been in his life.

Only the backfired Killing Curse had ever wounded him to this extent.

Voldemort staggered to his feet, gurgling incoherently as he splashed about in the muddied waters. He coughed twice and something tough and wet came from his mouth. Voldemort wiped the smear of gore on his tattered and almost-useless robes and observed his watery reflection grimly. He could not see or hear Harry Potter anywhere but knew that it would only be a matter of time. First though, his arm...

Voldemort considered his options for a moment. Then, he lifted his hand and sent out a call. For a moment nothing happened but then something came zooming along the sewers and into his hand. Voldemort gazed at the elder wand in appreciation and then tapped his arm. From the broken stub of a bone grew a snake with flickering yellow eyes. It coiled and wrapped itself down from the stump until it resembled the size of an arm, and then Voldemort tapped it with his wand and began his spell work.

For all his faults as a human being, Lord Voldemort was a genius and in a matter of minutes he had grown himself another arm, albeit one a bit scaly and flexible than before. Voldemort grimaced as he tested his fingers, noting wryly that it would not be wise to use that hand for any complicated wand movements.

His magic was still potent but it was weak and escaping his battered form. He needed to rest and recover somewhere for a few moments.

Voldemort's eyes suddenly shot upwards and he sighed. It looked as if he would not have a chance to recuperate. Down the sewer tunnel, further into the darkness than even he could see, was a small glow. Voldemort took in a deep breath as the glow grew brighter and brighter and a hot breeze swept over him. From the other end of the tunnel came Harry Potter, his body still enshrouded by a cocoon of fire and his eyes wreathed in flame. His burning wings were stretched out behind him and he was gliding over the water in a manner unknown.

No, Voldemort decided. This was not the ideal location to confront this madman again. Without another thought, the powerful dark wizard turned around and dug his heels into the water's surface and lifted his wand. He charmed himself and was abruptly propelled through the water as if dragged by a powerful force, his foot skidding and sliding over the muddied surface and away from the raging demon following him.

Lord Voldemort knew the secrets behind the sewers of Hogwarts and he knew where they led. Fire billowed out behind him but Voldemort swung around a corner and the raging mass of heat surged past him. The Dark Lord kept this up for a few moments, winding in and out of sewer tunnels as he made his way deeper and deeper into the bowels of the school. Finally, he came across a t-section that looked vaguely familiar and raised his wand as he approached it.

“Frendo!”

A deep violet light surged from his wand and the powerful curse slammed forward into the wall. A loud roar echoed in the tunnels as Voldemort tore the stone in front of him apart and propelled himself over the rubble and through the newly formed hole. He soared in the air and the sage-like face of Salazar Slytherin stared back at him as he entered the Chamber of Secrets and dropped gracefully to the ground.

He did not waste a single second as he whirled around and brandished his wand over his head. Water and little bits of broken stone fell from the hall from the roof of the Chamber of Secrets and Voldemort gathered his power as a glow began to shine within the newly formed entrance. Voldemort allowed a deadly smile to cross his face and his nostrils flared as fire raced from the hole.

Harry Potter emerged forward, his fires burning brightly, and Voldemort lashed out with his wand. The waters around him surged and frothed with fury as Voldemort raised it from around the Chamber of Secrets and brought it all down on Potter. The Denarian was thrown into a whirling maelstrom of water that surrounded and bound him in place. Great clouds of steam arose as Hellfire clashed with the water but Voldemort summoned more and more from the sewers around them until a great swirling ball as large as the statue of Salazar Slytherin hovered in the air above him.

Great clouds of steam rose into the air and Voldemort used them to his advantage as he gestured at them with his newly-acquired hand and clenched his fist. The steam shimmered and became hard, long and thin. Dozens of long, jagged spikes of zoomed around the entrapped demon and speared into him from all directions. They pierced through the water and, as far as Voldemort could tell, impaled themselves in Potter's flesh. With the water restricting his fiery aura, the spears would have a greater chance to wound or kill the demon.

Voldemort faltered and his wand grew hot in his hand. His eyes widened and he looked up as the great watery mass wobbled on its axis, the sphere bulging once, then twice. A great roar of noise struck Voldemort and he lost control of the spell as the giant sphere of water exploded outwards in a blistering wave of heat. Voldemort was sent skidding back on the ground and wrapped his shadow around himself as he bounced along the cold, wet stone. He came to a stop along the base of the statue, his power waning and his temper rising.

This was impossible!

Voldemort staggered up and glared dangerously at Harry Potter, who was descending to the ground with his wings still spread out. A green glow was replacing the fiery gaze and he turned to Voldemort and

managed the first human emotion that the Dark Lord had seen on him since his transformation.

Smugness.

Voldemort's ire fuelled his power and he leapt forward with the Elder wand. Potter summoned great gouts of flame but Voldemort dodged it and they clashed in a whirlwind of flame and darkness. Deep in the bowels of Hogwarts Witchcraft and Wizardry, the two powerful beings battered away at the other. Both had risen above their human peers and it became a central focus of the battle as they showed a total disregard for their own well being. Magic surged through the air and both Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter took spells and blows that would have torn asunder the strongest materials on earth. Spell that sheered diamonds and melted steel caused scratches and burns as the two destined wizards circled each other. Spells were produced of such power that the ground cracked and the water was instantly vaporised. The air was scorched and burned and eldritch energies tore into the very thread of reality, arcs of chaotic power crackling and bursting into existence all around them.

At the very end, it had become a war of attrition.

Voldemort knew he could not win.

At the end of a flurry of fiery orbs that tore through one of the serpentine statues and sent it crashing to the ground, Lord Voldemort turned tail and fled from Harry Potter. He felt no shame or disgust as he sprinted along the cratered and melted ground towards the statue of Salazar Slytherin. He had weakened Albus Dumbledore and obtained a powerful weapon. If he was going to capitalise on that later on he needed to retreat and recuperate from the terrible wounds he had suffered today. Voldemort opened his mouth and hissed at the statue in front of him. A loud grating noise filled the air as Slytherin's mouth began to open and Voldemort couldn't help but sigh in relief. He knew a way from beyond the basilisk lair that would let him escape.

He was going to get away.

Something hot and burning rushed over his shoulder and Voldemort's vision flared with pain as a white-hot mass of Hellfire struck the statue. White noise filled his ears and for a single moment he felt the full brunt of the explosion come bearing down at him. He summoned the darkness to protect him but it was too weathered and burned to help.

Lord Voldemort stared into the heart of the explosion and was torn apart.

Absolute agony filled his body and he was barely aware of anything as he was sent flying backwards, deadly pieces of shrapnel and debris tearing into his defenceless body, ripping it to shreds. His power fled him and for the first time since he was a child Lord Voldemort was truly helpless. His burned and mangled body was thrown violently to the ground and he bounced along the hard stone for a few moments until he finally came to a stop.

He gurgled but was otherwise still.

Faintly, he could hear footsteps approaching him and managed to weakly turn his head. Harry Potter, his eyes glowing green, sneered down at him and Voldemort couldn't help but notice how wounded and weak his opponent looked. He seemed to be bulging at the seams with raging fire, as if it were the only thing that was holding him together.

"I will live on," Voldemort murmured, almost deliriously. His body was getting light and his mind was getting foggy. "We will meet again, Harry Potter. This will not kill me. I...I have overcome death...risen above mortality..."

"You won't be back," Potter spat at him and his voice was hoarse and weak. "We know about your Horcruxes..."

Voldemort went still and a sudden chill swept through him.

"They're all gone, Voldemort," Potter told him and Voldemort's eyes went wide. "All except the one in front of me- your body. This is your death!"

“No....no...” Voldemort tried to protest against fate to no avail.

“I win, Voldemort.” Harry grinned and raised a hand. Fire began to glow, a deep burning light that would tear Voldemort from this world and into darkness and obscurity. “I’m powerful, I’m immortal and I will never die. Take comfort in that before you die. You were defeated by the very thing you aspired to be.”

No.

Never!

Voldemort focussed all of his energies, the last of his battered magic, and his crimson eyes glowed. If he were to die, then he would not let Harry Potter survive to proclaim his superiority over him! His finger twitched and Voldemort watched as a beam of Hellfire tore into his body, severing flesh from magic. He managed one final gurgle but a single thought rang through his mind.

‘Animus Discerpo!’

For Harry, the weak flash of light that struck him was the nail in the coffin. The soul severing curse struck his chest and for a split-second, the Hellfire that sustained him was forcibly restrained. It was all that was needed and as Lord Voldemort was consumed by the darkest of fire beneath him Harry Potter’s eyes widened and he literally collapsed in a ragged mess of blood and gore. Harry gurgled as blood filled his airways and his head flopped uselessly to the side, where he saw just the tiniest glimmer of triumph on Voldemort’s face before the Dark Lord was consumed by Hellfire and Harry’s vision went black.

When Harry regained his senses, he found that he was surrounded by utter blackness. He was floating in a set of darkness, unchained by any physical constraint, yet he found that his limbs were paralysed and he could not move. He struggled against his bonds for a few moments but it was futile and Harry finally sagged back into them.

What was going on?

What had happened?

His mind felt clearer than it had before and he tried to review the fight with Voldemort. Most of it was blacked out and he remembered nothing but a terrible heat that burned within him and pain- oh, the pain had been horrible. Something within had changed, had evolved, and it had tore at his psyche so badly that he had almost lost himself.

Had he lost himself?

Where was he?

Suddenly and with a loud static buzz the very air around him cracked and fell away and Harry found himself standing in a peaceful meadow once again. He frowned in confusion, gazing around carefully at his surroundings. A strange sensation was spilling into him, an odd sense of lightness and detachment, and Harry took a deep breath to still himself. The air cracked and the meadow blurred, as if it were a fuzzy television picture trying to assert itself, before it went back to normal. Harry blinked and almost missed it as the very world around him flickered in and out of existence. For a split-second, Harry had seen a field of death, a field with brown grass and rotting crops and a cracked, parched ground. A second later, it had returned to what it had previously been.

Harry spotted the little wooden hut in the centre of the field and made his way towards it.

He knew what he would find inside.

“Meciel,” Harry greeted quietly.

The Fallen was sitting at the table, facing away from him. Her luxurious dark hair spilled over her back and her silver and white dress fluttered softly in the breeze. Harry smiled at her and opened his mouth when the world flickered again. Disgust and revulsion burned in his stomach and Harry let out a wrangled gasp by what he saw. Meciel, who had been turning towards Harry, had, for a split-second, become

a creature of death. Her hair had been white and fallen, her skin rotting and filled with maggots and her eyes sunken in and blank. Large wings had been stretched out behind her but the feathers had been falling off and the bones underneath had begun to turn to dust. It had been a truly horrible sight and one that Harry had not wanted to see on one he loved.

“Harry,” Meciél murmured and resignation flickered in her eyes. She gestured. “Have a seat.”

Harry sat down silently and the Fallen and human gazed at one another. Finally, Harry regained his wits and remembered the most likely cause as to why he was there in the first place.

“Meciél,” Harry began solemnly. “I didn’t really say thank you before but here it is. Thank you for everything. Thank you for loving me and taking care of me and giving me power. I want you to live on and find somebody a new host, somebody who is as perfect as they can get without actually being me. You’re a strong woman and a mighty Denarian. You will survive this. It’ll hurt, yes, but...”

“Harry?” Meciél interrupted and Harry paused. “Practise much?”

“On the way down,” Harry shrugged indifferently. He managed a weak smile. “I remember when we met here last time and you started blubbering like a little girl.”

Meciél cocked her head and considered her response. “Fuck you.”

Harry snickered at the very human answer. “Believe me,” he told her amusedly. “I’ve been trying to get in your pants for a long time...”

The two stared at each other and began to laugh. Harry was almost hysterical as he pounded the table, his chest rattling and his breaths heaving in and out. For a few moments, he simply laughed even as Meciél tapered off and stared at him sadly.

“Ah well,” Harry said after his laughter died down. “At least I took Voldemort down. I thought the bastard had gone and killed me until

you- what did you do? I could have sworn I was dead and about to enter hell when you came and dragged me back.”

Meciel reached out and stroked Harry’s hand. “My dear beloved host,” she said fondly. “When you were dying, I reached out into my prison in the Void and took all the power I used to save myself and saved you instead. The coin was destroyed but you were spared for a few more moments.”

“You what?” Harry was on his feet before he knew it and he loomed over Meciel, glaring down at her. “Are you retarded? Without a vessel, you’ll be stuck in the Void forever and without your power you’re going to become as fucked-up as those nut job Denarians!”

“No, I won’t,” Meciel murmured and Harry paused in his fury. “If that was the case then why would I still be here? No. When the coin was destroyed something led me to your body and you became my ‘prison’. With your death imminent, there is no escape for me.”

Harry was rooted to the ground by her silver gaze. Meciel flickered again and her leering, worm-ridden skull suddenly made a lot of sense to him. Horror surged through him. She was going to die. She was going to die for him, with him.

What had he done?

“My beloved host,” Meciel said fondly and reached out and stroked his cheek. “Whether you believe it or not, I’m so glad we can die together.”

The world flickered again and Harry caught sight of his own arm. It too was decaying and dead and a grim sense of understanding filled him. He was barely aware as Meciel pulled him down and settled him against her. She reached up and began stroking his hair lovingly, to which Harry let out a weary sigh and nestled his head on her shoulder. They sat together in silence for a few moments before Harry noticed that it was becoming dim. He looked out the window and saw that a terrible darkness was encroaching on the beautiful sky

above. The world flickered again and again, the shifts becoming more and more frequent.

Harry snorted. At least there was no Hellfire.

“You’re an idiot,” Harry criticised Meciél tiredly. “You’re such an idiot.”

“I know,” Meciél said, and her leering skull stared down at him fondly. “This is the second time that love has led me to my end. I really should have learned my lesson the first time.”

Harry grunted. After a moment, he nestled back against Meciél. “I didn’t want to die, you know, but I think that was an awesome way to go.” He paused. “They’ll never forget me, will they?”

He must have sounded like such a lonely child looking for that last bit of recognition because Meciél’s face was full of pity as she stared down at him. The darkness began to creep into the kitchen and the world hissed and spluttered around them as death came to claim them both. A smile crossed her beautiful face and her eyes were full of affection as she shook her head.

“You, Harry Potter, the one who destroyed Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the one who slew the Dark Lord Voldemort, the one who toppled the Blackened Order of Denarius, the one who rose to surpass his mentor, the one whose daughter will one day reign over the Winter Court as Queen- no, beloved. They will not forget you.”

The darkness had surrounded them and enshrouded them in a sense of bitter coldness, almost similar to the power of Winter. The world let out one more flicker before Harry was surrounded by that utter blackness once again. This time, however, a source of warmth curled around him and he was able to move his arms far enough to place them around Meciél. Together, the two watched as the darkness sucked them in from all sides and held each other as death came to claim them.

Then they knew no more.

Albus Dumbledore found him panting by the time he reached the end of the trail of destruction and devastation that Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter had left behind them. His normally twinkling blue eyes were cold and hard, a stark contrast with his creased forehead and stooped back. The wand in his gnarled hand never wavered as the Headmaster slowly approached the Chamber of Secrets.

He paused at the entrance and, like he had done four years ago, forced it open with a flick of his wand and a single word. The door groaned in protest but gave way as the powerful wizard lifted his wand above his head and stepped forward. His gaze took in everything at once and he slowly approached the simmering hunk of blackened flesh. Without a sound, Albus gazed down at the mangled body that had once been the most powerful dark wizard that he had ever encountered. He looked and he smiled with grim satisfaction.

Albus Dumbledore had not liked Tom Riddle as a child. He had liked him even less as a fully-fledged wizard, and he would spare no pity or remorse for Voldemort's death. Albus took in a deep breath and then turned around, turning his back on Lord Voldemort once and for all.

Albus approached the second body in the deserted and ruined chamber, passing by piles of fallen stone and puddles of muddied water. A mass of blood and gore was all that remained of Harry and Albus cringed as he took in the boy that had in many ways been his best friend for the past year. He did not know what Voldemort had done but it looked as if Harry had come apart at the seams. It was not a pleasant sight and Albus sighed wearily.

"My dear boy," he murmured sorrowfully. "You did not deserve this."

He did not expect an answer and was shocked when a rattling, gurgling breath responded to his comment. Albus drew back, his eyes wide with surprise, and watched as the tattered remains of Harry's chest heaved up and down once before falling still again.

Was it possible? Could Harry still be alive?

Albus watched and waited and was rewarded with another gurgling, rattled breath. He shook his head with wry fondness, a bitter smile crossing his face. In the end, it seemed as if Harry Potter was more inhuman than Lord Voldemort. Still, he could not complain. He was rather fond of the boy, after all. It was sad then that there would be very little he could do to prevent Harry's death, not how he was and not with the level of wounds the boy had sustained. His heart heavy, Albus lifted his wand and prepared to at least try to help the young Denarian when something caught his eye. The Elder Wand gleamed underneath and flickered with a dark violet light and Albus froze.

Harry Potter had defeated Lord Voldemort. Lord Voldemort had possessed the Elder Wand. Therefore, the new master of the most powerful wand in the world, the wand that brought death and destruction to all those who possessed it, the wand that had once been his, belonged to Harry.

A Denarian Lord.

For a single, split second, Albus Dumbledore faced temptation that he had not encountered since his split with Lord Grindelwald and the death of his sister. His mind screamed at him to do one thing while his heart, fickle and capricious, leapt in the other direction. Finally, in the end, Albus took a deep shuddering breath and turned his wand upon Harry.

“Expelliarmus!”

Albus Dumbledore gazed down at the bloodied mess that was the master of the Elder Wand and disarmed him. The Elder Wand bucked towards him once and then again and finally zoomed up and into his hand. Albus took the wand and felt a great weight fall on his shoulders once more. He sighed and allowed his magic to flow through the mighty weapon in his hand.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” Albus apologized quietly. “But I cannot allow you to wield this weapon. This burden is still mine to carry.”

Harry's beaten, broken and battered body did not make a sound and it dawned on Albus that the Denarian had finally stopped breathing. With his power surging once more, the Elder Wand obeyed his commands and he powered it with sheer determination as he swished it at Harry and engulfed Harry in a golden glow.

He would not allow anybody else to die for his mistakes. Tonight had made that perfectly clear to him.

Sometime later, Albus emerged from beneath the school with torn and muddied robes. His wounded chest, wrapped with conjured bandages that were already stained with blood, heaved with exertion but he nonetheless held himself with a quiet dignity, his eyes regarding the Aurors and staff sadly.

The Minister of Magic, surrounded by a squad of Hit Wizards, strode up him. "Albus," he said shortly. "Where is Voldemort? Where is Harry Potter?"

Albus remained silent and considered his answer as the crowd hushed and waited for him breathlessly. Finally, and with great care, Albus turned to the Minister of Magic.

"He is dead," he answered and a wave of whispers rippled out through the crowd. "Lord Voldemort is dead. I have confirmed it myself."

The answer rung through the hall for a few moments before the air became ablaze with cheers and happiness. Aurors turned to each other and hugged each other while Professor Flitwick sighed and finally allowed himself to rest. In the middle of all of this, Amanda Carpenter was silent as she stared at Albus with pleading grey eyes. The Headmaster knew what she wanted him to say and took a deep breath to steady himself.

"That's good news," Rufus said over the din and stroked his chin. "And Potter?"

Albus closed his eyes and shook his head. He tried to ignore the tears that sprung to Amanda's eyes as he turned away and started limping towards his office. It was best this way, best that the young girl moved on with her life. The sword that lay on her shoulders suggested to him that she would find out what had happened eventually but Albus brushed it aside and turned his focus on more important matters.

The war may have been over but there was still much work to be done.

One Week Later

THE DAILY PROPHEET

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry Reopened!

The Wizarding World Celebrates the Death of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named

By Rita Skeeter

A week has passed since Harry Potter and You-Know-Who met in a final duel of fate within the hallowed halls of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. During a single night, the second rising of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was thwarted and the darkest wizard of the century was killed, his followers scattered and his stranglehold on the Wizarding World broken. The casualty count has risen to forty-three, just under half of those being a class of Second Year students attending an Astronomy Class, and including the slayer of You-Know-Who himself, Harry Potter.

Harry Potter was reported to have dabbled in dark magic himself and his death comes after a warrant was sent out for his arrest. Minister for Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, has responded to public comments by addressing the...

Albus did not need to read anymore and he carefully placed the Daily Prophet on the table beside his plate and gazed out at Great Hall. It had taken a few days before repairs on the school had started but sheer numbers of volunteers from all cross-sections of life had stepped up and volunteered their services. Albus had been allowed to sit back and rest while old students, some as old as he and some just scant years out of 7th Year, toiled away with magic and might, lifting the heavy piles of debris away while specialised builders began assessing and planning for the repair of the Astronomy Tower. While there was still much more work to be done, Albus and the Board of Governors had decided that the damage had been contained and it was safe enough to allow the students to return.

The Great Hall was full of students and although the usual house colours had been replaced with black in a show to respect those who had died within the halls of Hogwarts almost exactly a week ago, it did not seem to deter the students as they chatted and laughed and occasionally threw food at each other. Albus' keen eye spotted a small group of downtrodden Second Years and he frowned, sighing and shaking his head. Several of the Second Years who had witnessed the murder of their classmates had been sent home and did not want to return. Many of the others were showing clear signs of depression and insomnia and Albus resolved to approach Madame Promfrey about the situation.

Albus's eyes eventually found their way to one specific figure and a momentary frown broke through his benign features. The Second Year girl, Laura Madley, had been found unconscious but otherwise unharmed out on the school grounds. Albus had been in disbelief when he had first heard because he had been absolutely positive that Lord Voldemort had killed the muggleborn with his bare hands. A quick inspection of the girl had alerted Albus to what had really happened and even now he sat quietly on the secret, uncertain as to where to go with it.

Could he allow another Denarian attend this school? Privately, Albus knew that the only reason he had been so tolerant with Harry at first was because of certain details that the Headmaster had known about Voldemort and the prophecy. There was very little to gain and very much to lose to allow another unknown Denarian slip through the halls and get a foothold in the Wizarding World. It was hard to tell what the Fallen was thinking but Albus could confirm that the girl was still in possession of her soul and the Fallen had, so far, remained dormant.

He had to trust in Harry. Harry would not have given one of the students a coin unless he knew that she would be fine.

Harry.

Albus stroked his beard thoughtfully and leaned back in his chair. Harry Potter had departed the castle only a few hours ago, saying a

hasty goodbye before he had practically fled from him. Albus wasn't quite sure what had happened between Meciél and Harry, only that it had somehow changed the fundamental way of their relationship and Harry was perhaps not ready for that to be publically seen. Besides, it would have been awkward at best had a stray witch of wizard spotted the new hero and had leaked words of his survival. At the moment, the entire world thought Harry Potter dead and Albus would do his best to propagate that until the day he died.

Harry was a trump card- a trump card at those who would seek to harm the Wizarding World. Dark Lords rose and fell and there was always somebody to take their place in the end. Albus had suspicions, faint and unjustified suspicions, that the newest one would not be too far off.

Somebody had been working with Maeve, somebody within the Wizarding World. The Winter Lady would only have been attracted to somebody with power, political, magical or physical, somebody who could spread her influence. Lord Voldemort claimed that it had not been him and while he may have been lying there was also the slightest chance that the Dark Lord had been honest.

If not him- then who?

Albus suspected that it would be Harry who would find out- and probably the hard way too and, as much as he genuinely liked and respected the Denarian Lord Albus would not have had it any other way. He nestled back into his seat and allowed himself to relax. Within his robes came a small chirp and Albus smiled at the annoyance he heard in Fawkes's tone. She would recover with time and Albus would reach the peak of his strength yet again.

He was still burdened with knowledge and power he quite honestly did not want, yet, for the first time in a very long time Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, was content.

Amanda Carpenter scowled at nothing in particular as she sat crossed-legged at the edge of her bed. She could just imagine the smiling, cheerful faces of the other students down in the Great Hall and her fury and anguish threatened to explode from her. Amanda

took a deep breath, closed her grey eyes and tried to calm herself down.

It didn't work.

"Damn it!" Amanda shouted and jumped up from the bed.

Her arms fumbled about her and her hands closed around the first thing she could find, a bedside lamp, and she picked it up and hurled it at the door. It struck it with a solid thump and the lamp fell to the ground as Amanda whirled around, her eyes ablaze with great anger.

"God damn it, Harry! Why did you have to...?" Amanda trailed off and she stopped.

The Knight of the Cross heaved a depressed sigh and the anger drained away from her, leaving a mixture of sorrow and resignation. She shook her head fiercely as she felt a familiar prickle burn at the sides of her eyes. Amanda refused to cry, refused to let the tears spill, because she could just hear Harry's voice in the back of her mind mocking and jeering at her. She managed a watery smile at the image of Harry berating her for her weakness.

Harry Potter had been her first love. Sure, she had had crushes before but they had been tiny and insignificant little things. She had loved Harry for his strength, his bravery, his independence- and she recognised that which so very few people could see. Harry Potter had been a good person. He had been crude, rough and abrasive but Amanda had seen how he had shown compassion to the weak and needy and been utterly and entirely unmerciful when it came to the wicked.

He had been like a vengeful angel, which was fitting given his status.

She should have been happy. As a Knight of the Cross, she should have been ecstatic that the last Denarian had been killed. There was no coin to collect but Amanda was positive that Professor Dumbledore would not have allowed such a dangerous artefact to leave the school in unsafe hands. Amanda made a mental note to

speak to Dumbledore about that. Harry may have been dead but Meciél was quite possible alive and trapped within a coin and Amanda, no matter how much she did not like Meciél, could not allow someone Harry had loved to suffer.

Even if she had to pick up the coin herself.

Amanda sighed and sat back down with a thump. She winced as her backside met something and uncomfortable and reached down under the covers. She came up with a large book of some kind and threw it aside with only a careless glance. The large tome fell to the floor with a thud and that was what brought Amanda out of her stupor. Since when had she owned such a large book?

Amanda flicked her wand and the book slowly floated up off of the ground and settled in the air right in front of her. It was a large, dusty-looking tome with a cracked spine. It was clearly quite old and Amanda swished her wand, opening the cover with curiosity. Something fluttered out of the page and Amanda's hand shot forward, snatching the small piece of torn parchment before it could hit the ground. She turned it over and read it.

To the Brat,

Try not to embarrass me any more than possible. It'll make me look bad.

I had a few days free so I decided to leave you some notes. Come find me when you're a somewhat decent witch- if that ever happens.

With Much Annoyance and Irritation

Your Awesome God

Amanda's heart pounded in her chest and her eyes were wide as she turned her gaze back to the book. With shaking hands, she flipped the pages over to where the piece of parchment had fallen out. There, on the top right of the page, was a small notation, 'AD + GG'.

Under that somebody had scrawled in 'and HP'. Amanda quickly turned through the pages, a wide and beautiful smile forming on her face. There were pages and pages of notes. For many of the pages the ink was old and faded and the writing was neat, slanted and cursive. But, at the very back of the book, there was a new section in a familiar, messy scrawl that Amanda had grown to know after two years of schooling with the boy. Her eyes drank it all in and her mouth opened in astonishment as she saw a continuation of the lessons that Harry had given her.

It was fresh too.

It couldn't have been more than a few days old.

Amanda's emotion surged from bewilderment to surprise to happiness and joy and continued to spiral out of control until she finally settled on one. Her grey eyes flashed angrily and her blonde hair billowed out around her as she slammed her hands on her bed.

"Harry! You bastard!" She screamed out furiously. "You...you...I thought you were dead!"

Nobody answered her and Amanda faintly remembered that everybody else was at the feast. She scowled and flicked her wand, and the book went flying onto her bed. Amanda dropped down next to it with a look of determination and her resolve strengthened.

"A competent witch, huh?" Amanda growled as she began to read. "I'll show him."

The words may have been a little blurry as Amanda cried with tears of joy and relief but she didn't let that slow her down. Her inner drive had been renewed and she had found a new purpose. For the time being, Amanda Carpenter, Knight of the Cross, was content.

"Oh yeah. This is great."

Harry Potter was on a warm beach, a pair of sunglasses hiding his green eyes from view as he lounged back on a deck chair. His

recently beaten and battered body was still very weak and he had dozens of scars all over his chest but he was alive. A small smile crossed his face as Harry relaxed under the sun of the tropical island.

Next to him, Meciél lounged in her own deck chair. Her dark hair glittered in the light and her smooth pale skin was bronzing quite nicely- even if it was just an illusion. Her bikini-clad body was visible only to Harry but her illusion was enjoying the sensation of sun just the same. The two were tightly entwined now and it was hard to tell when one of them started and the other began. They were a mixture of mortal and divine, something unique and powerful. Never before in the vast history of the world had Meciél heard or seen something like this happening.

Harry found that honestly didn't mind that much. In fact, it had been interesting trying to see when Meciél's breasts began until the Fallen, his Fallen, had started being tricky about it.

"It is enjoyable, yes," Meciél answered and her voice was warm and caring. Harry gazed over at her and grinned and she smiled back.

"A bit of rest before the next quest will do us a bit of good," Harry remarked out loud and idly watched the seagulls soar and buzz around above him. He narrowed his eyes and mentally calculated how much power and effort it would take him to set them ablaze. It was an automatic process now and maybe Harry was being too careful but it was best to start being conservative as soon as could.

"You needn't worry," Meciél remarked lightly. "I have powers that match those of the gods. My well of Hellfire will not run dry for quite some time."

"If you can't regenerate your own power any more then you don't have the power of a god," Harry rebutted mildly. "I don't want to rush through your power and waste it all before I get the chance to fix this. I'm still immortal, you know, so if you think you can a thousand years like this then you're dreaming."

"I don't think it can be fixed," Meciél said quietly.

“We’ll see,” Harry said evenly. He flipped to his side and gazed at her beautiful form. “Meciel, I am going to spend the rest of my life finding a solution to this. I will restore your powers, I will give you a new home and I will make sure that you stay safe in case I die.”

“Hmm,” was all Meciel said. She was quiet for a few moments. “I am not concerned, you know. I have already seen to it that your body will not age and by the time my Hellfire runs dry you will be a powerful and potent wizard in your own right. You would not need me for power and my consciousness would always remain with you.”

Harry shrugged and turned over on his stomach. “I’d get bored if I didn’t have something to aspire to anyway. Besides,” he added wryly. “It will be a good distraction between now and the next big thing that I’ll end up getting dragged into.”

“Oh? Like what?”

“Who knows?” Harry said lazily. His keen eyes spotted a pair of beautiful teenage girls strolling along the footpath above him and he was tempted to go and join them. Harry stared at Meciel from the corner of his eye and, with a sigh, flipped back over on his stomach and closed his eyes.

“Not interested?” Meciel sounded amused.

“Can’t be fucked,” Harry answered lazily. He cocked a single eye open and leered at her. “Besides, there’s better eye candy here.”

Meciel laughed and Harry smirked. Together, the Fallen and the human relaxed. Their fight was far from done but for now they had earned their rest. Harry Potter, the Denarian Lord, was content.

A petite raven-haired girl gingerly lowered herself upon her icy throne and stared out at her subjects. There was no emotion on her face but Amaris Potter, the Winter Lady, found that she was content- for now.

Laura Madley, Second Year Hufflepuff, looked up at her friends with a wide grin on her friendly face. They all missed the flicker of fire that shot through her eyes as the entity within her began to stir. Deep within her, Verrine absorbed her new surroundings with relish. Free of the Void yet again, she mutually cursed and thanked Harry Potter. It would be hard adjusting to a new host and his warning rang through her ears even now. Yet, despite that, she would make do and would be content with what she had- for now.

And, in a dusty shop on the corner of Diagon and Knocturn Alleys, a golden pendent wreathed into the shape of a large 'S' glowed with a malevolent green light and shuddered for a few moments before going still.

A/N: As you can see, I've left it quite open-ended and with lots of potential plot points just in case I ever want to come back to it or write an omake. There's likely to be a few of them, so keep an eye out on The Denarian Omake for some fun. I have no plans on another Denarian story. I also like leaving open-ended endings to give something to stir the imagination, to keep people wondering what will happen next.

Final Authors Notes: Well, well, well. It seems that this series has finally come to an end. It's been a long two and a half years since I started posting The Denarian Renegade and I still remember when I came up with the idea, a hazy little bunny on the train home from university. It's gone far and I have a lot of people to thank for it.

Thanks to Jon and Nuhuh for being constant beta's and idea-bouncers. A lot of the best scenes in the story came from 1 of the 2, I can tell you that now. You were awesome and kept me writing whenever I didn't want to.

Thanks to the DarkLordPotter community. I know everybody portrays them as dicks but they're a great bunch for wiggling out plot-holes and bad ideas. There are too many to name but there' at least 50 or 60 constant people who went out of their way to review and make

corrections and suggestions that I, more often than not, found to be very useful. I'd have abandoned this story long ago without them.

Thanks to you guys out at . I'd never gave gotten this far, in the series and as a writer, without you. This is probably going to be my last foray into fanfiction and I'm moving onto an original series. I know I'm not quite good enough yet but I think it's time that I gave it a try.

Ok. Any longer and they'll start playing music and, fuck, it's just fanfiction for God's sake.

It's been fun.

Have a great New Year.

Sincerely,

Shezza